

Forgiveness

Transforming Social Life, Restoring Peace and Love through the Proper Practice of Forgiveness
MOUKOUOP NGUENA Ibrahim

Romans 5:7-8: “7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. 8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, **while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.**”

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Introduction

One day, someone asked me, "*God said forgive your brother seventy times seven. How many times did He forgive Adam and Eve?*" This simple question profoundly encapsulates the human species' poor relationship with forgiveness, which has led to numerous disasters in lives and continues to poison many lives today. It is useful to know the correct answer to this question, as it can very positively and significantly change lives.

Before answering the question, let's examine Adam's response when God reproached him for his sin:

Genesis 3:11-13 "*And the LORD God said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat."*

In Adam's response, two culprits are found: the woman who gave him the fruit and God who placed this woman beside him. He sees himself as the innocent victim of these two beings and provides the explanation, even justification, for his act.

When the woman is questioned, she also identifies her culprit: the serpent. She, too, is the innocent victim of this serpent, which can also be considered a creation of God.

Here, both have found explanations or justifications for their sin, as well as the culprits. This attitude of Adam and Eve remains the preferred attitude of the human species to this day. Men and women who commit faults, errors, omissions, or transgressions of all kinds are generally quick, naturally, to find justification for their actions and to assign the blame to someone else. We have not learned any lesson from the past.

What lesson should we learn?

How to Handle an Offense

Let us return to Jesus' teaching on forgiveness and read it:

"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." Matthew 18:15-17

Addressing the Issue Privately, Sticking to the Facts

The first part of this text must be read carefully:

"*If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between **thee and him alone.***" Some English versions say: "**If your brother sins against you, go and confront him privately.**" Genesis 3:11-13

« [Strong's Greek: 4771. οὐ \(su\) -- you \(early mod. Eng. thou\) \(biblehub.com\)](#)»

What is said is clear. If your brother has sinned against you, it is not a reason to go and tell others all the wrong you think of him. It is not even a reason to tell your confidant what this other person did to you. Go to him directly, and discuss the matter with him alone, without involving others. By doing so, you also apply the commandment "*thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,*" as it is said, "*Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.*" Matthew 7:12

Normally, a person would not want someone who has a reason to accuse them to go first and speak ill of them to others before even expressing their grievance.

There is another reason why it is better to start by expressing your discontent to the person you are reproaching. It is because our judgment is sometimes flawed since we do not have all the elements to assess the reality. This is also why Jesus says "**Judge not, that ye be not judged,**" and also "**For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged.**" Matthew 7:1-2 You might reproach someone for not attending your meeting, calling others to explain how unreliable they are, while that person had an accident or an assault on their way to see you and is still in the hospital. Going to the supposed offender helps understand their motivations and assess whether they are truly at fault.

It is important to mention that when approaching someone to express your discontent, the manner of presenting the issue is very important, as it can create peace or conflict. You must stick to the facts without making a judgment about the person, their morals, or their values. Present the problematic fact and explain how it is a problem. For example, "**You did not come to our meeting yesterday, and you did not inform me, which caused me a lot of trouble,**" is preferable to "**You are always dishonest and never keep your word. You have once again demonstrated this.**" The first formulation sticks to the fact and its consequence, whereas the second attacks the individual, who, despite the fact, might try to defend themselves against the attack, which can escalate the situation.

What Are the Conditions for Forgiveness and Why Forgive?

The obligation to forgive exists if there is a request for forgiveness, and only in that case:

"But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."

There is normally a prerequisite for forgiveness, and this prerequisite is the request for forgiveness. That is why it is said in the Lord's Prayer, "**And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.**" Matthew 6:12 God forgives those who ask for forgiveness, and He asks us to forgive those who ask us for forgiveness. The forgiveness we must grant to those who ask for forgiveness is mandatory, as in our prayer, we say that just as we forgive, so it will be done unto us. Thus, if we do not forgive our neighbor, God will not forgive our sins.

"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 fellow servants, 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 fellow servant 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 fellow servants 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 fellow servant, 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."* Matthew 18:23-35

Combien de fois Dieu a-t-il pardonné à Adam et Eve ?

At least as many times as they asked for forgiveness. That is the right and true answer.

Even today, many of us refuse to ask for forgiveness, wallowing in justifications and explanations that, far from exonerating us, only worsen the situation. By repeating the mistakes of our ancestors, we also produce similar consequences. Asking for forgiveness costs nothing and brings more love and peace than many unnecessary justifications. Even if we believe we have explanations to make our actions better understood or tolerated, we generally gain nothing by starting with asking for forgiveness from our neighbor before providing any explanation if necessary.

Many of us also refuse to forgive those who ask for it while daily seeking God's forgiveness. Not only does refusing to forgive generally create health problems for us, but it also closes the doors to God's forgiveness and grace. Rather than being quick to refuse forgiveness, we should learn to request forgiveness from those who have offended us, and if we do not wish to do so, we can simply choose to forgive them.

What Is Forgiveness?

There are several definitions of forgiveness in literature, and they are very pertinent. Various meanings can be given to the act of forgiving (see [here](#) for some examples [Définition - pardonner \(notrefamille.com\)](#)). I have chosen to provide my own definition of forgiveness, which seems compatible with the various situations I am familiar with regarding forgiveness:

Definition 1: Forgiveness = "**Renouncing all resentment, bitterness, and all vengeful punishment toward a guilty person for the act that is the object of their guilt.**"

I will also mention this other definition from literature that provides a second perspective on forgiveness and will comment on both definitions.

Definition 2: Forgiveness = "The action of treating a fault or offense as null, not holding it against the guilty party, and not retaining resentment."

In my definition of forgiveness (Definition 1), it should be noted that this act does not necessarily extend to the second definition, which implies treating a fault as null, raising the issue of the consequences of the fault.

In Definition 1, forgiveness involves renouncing all resentment and bitterness. It also involves renouncing all vengeful punishment, which is not the same as renouncing all punishment. Thus, while granting forgiveness, one can still seek, when possible, the just restitution of the act committed or impose a corrective and exemplary punishment, which is not the same as a vengeful punishment. Let's explain these elements:

The Just Restitution of the Act: If someone has stolen and comes to repent and seek forgiveness, we may grant forgiveness while asking them to return the stolen goods. In some cases, we might even condition forgiveness on this restitution if we believe they have the means to restore and that this act helps assess the sincerity of their request for forgiveness. If their theft caused other demonstrable losses (e.g., lost opportunities, health deterioration due to lack of funds for medical care), we can extend the restitution request to these losses if the circumstances and their abilities justify it.

Forgiveness is not necessarily a renunciation of our rights or justice, although we can also extend our forgiveness to include the cancellation of the guilty party's debt. This absolution of the guilty party is not a condition of forgiveness; it is simply a free choice.

An Exemplary and Corrective Punishment: Punishment can very well accompany forgiveness when it is exemplary or corrective, and not vengeful. An exemplary punishment is one given as an example to deter others from committing the same act in the future. A corrective punishment aims to deter the guilty party from repeating the offense. For instance, a parent who punishes their child for theft, even after recovering the stolen item, not only tries to prevent the child from stealing again (corrective punishment) but also sends a message to siblings about the consequences of theft (exemplary punishment). Similarly, an employer who severely punishes an employee for theft or indiscipline does so to clearly communicate to others what might happen if they engage in similar actions. As the Bible says:

"He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes."
Proverbs 13:24

Let us remember that a vengeful punishment is driven by a desire for revenge and is thus fueled by resentment and bitterness. This is different from corrective punishment. When a child commits a fault, the parent punishes to correct them, without resentment or revenge. Note that complete absence of punishment is not always desirable, as it may lead to multiple insincere requests for forgiveness and even deceitful behavior from those who might commit malicious acts, thinking that if they are caught, they can simply ask for forgiveness to receive total absolution without proper restitution or just punishment.

This is why I appreciate associations that, when resolving a dispute among members, require the guilty party, in addition to just restitution of the harm caused, to provide food and drink to other members to celebrate reconciliation.

Let us remember that when exemplary or corrective punishment exists, it must always be just, not disproportionate to the fault, and done with the mindset of a parent toward their child. When it is not addressed to someone for whom we naturally have much affection or love, it is even desirable that it be approved by neutral and just persons to ensure that it does not carry any trace of revenge. This approval can be useful for those we have a lot of affection for, to ensure that the punishment is not too lenient and thus ineffective on the punished person or without any exemplary effect.

Definition 1 also implies that forgiveness is not forgetting the act committed, and forgiveness does not exclude taking all measures derived from the experience to avoid being a victim of such an act in the future. If I have forgiven a thief, I may well decide never to give them access to my wallet again, as there is nothing to say they will not return to their thieving ways. I might even decide never to leave my office door open in my absence to avoid falling victim to other thieves.

Biblical example of forgiveness with punishment

The story is told in 2 Samuel 12, which I encourage you to read (easily found on the internet via Google).

When King David had Bathsheba's husband killed after committing adultery with her, God sent the prophet Nathan to convey His disapproval of David's actions. David himself, upon hearing Nathan's parable as if it concerned someone else, judged the person who committed such an act worthy of death and required to pay fourfold for restitution. When Nathan told him that it was David himself, David repented. Nathan told him that he was forgiven.

2 Samuel 12:13 "And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, **The LORD also hath put away thy sin;** thou shalt not die. 14 Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the **child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.**"

Before this, the prophet pronounces the sentence of punishment related to David's sin:

2 Samuel 12:11-12 "*Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. 12 For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.*"

Note that David's sin is said to be forgiven after he repented, but his son will still die as punishment. One might think that the punishments announced before his repentance and forgiveness are erased, but this is not the case. In the end, **David will lose four of his sons, and ten** of his wives will be taken by his own son, publicly!

Consider this: David was anointed by God, chosen to be king. For one unjustly killed man, he lost **four** sons. For committing adultery, another lay with **ten of his wives, all this after the prophet told him he was forgiven!**

Indeed, he was forgiven, as not only did he remain alive, but God fulfilled the promise to always leave one of his descendants on the throne, as outside of this story, he served God faithfully.

This also teaches us not to hastily condemn others, for such condemnations are also indirect judgments we pronounce against ourselves for our own faults. David had demanded repayment fourfold. We have seen the result.

Matthew 7:1-3 "Judge not, that ye be not judged. 2 For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. 3 And why

beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?"

Many Christians believe they can continue to sin because they will receive forgiveness, which according to their understanding exempts them from any punishment! This is very false! That's why it's important not only to ask forgiveness from God for the sins committed against others but also to ask forgiveness from them! Even for sins committed by your parents that might have brought curses upon you, seek forgiveness and even make restitution if possible, as you may suffer the consequences otherwise.

Matthew 5:23-24 "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, 24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and **go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother**, and then come and offer thy gift."

Let Us Rid Ourselves of Pride

Proverbs 16:18 "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall."

Pride is one of the things that makes us very resistant to asking for forgiveness, always seeking to find excuses and justifications for our faults. Worse, pride is also something that often leads us to condemn others, to hold grudges against them for offending us, through their words, their actions, or for not giving us the consideration we believe we deserve.

The more we elevate ourselves above pride, the less reason we have to hold grudges against others regarding our person, and the more easily we can "lower" ourselves to remind others of our grievances against them.

May Forgiveness Be with You!

Some Readings on Forgiveness:

[Qu'est-ce que le pardon ? | Questions bibliques \(jw.org\)](#)

[Erreur \(over-blog.com\)](#)

[Blog blogspirit : Erreur 404](#)

[Questions2vie.com : Même les tiennes](#)

Consult My Publications on Various Topics:

You can view my publications on various topics here: [Liens vers mes publications chretiennes – Telegraph](#)

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