

How to Prayer in Power Part 6: The Power of Grace

October 08, 2023

Matthew 6:12, Eph. 4:31-32

“And forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors.” Forgiveness is the heart of what it means to live the Christian life. It is wrong to expect God to forgive us if we won't extend it to others.

4 Areas to Help Us Understand the Theology of Forgiveness.

1) **Difference Between Unforgiveness and Bitterness:** Eph. 4:31, these are the internal matters of the heart: bitterness, anger, wrath, and tenderheartedness in V32. This internal attitude includes forgiving one another (V32).

>>We must be careful in this instance of building a theology of forgiveness upon one verse. Forgiveness is used in two terms: 1) The attitude of forgiveness towards another -it is used in Eph.4:32- shown by “tenderheartedness,” it is internal forgiveness. 2) The restoration of the relationship. Reconciliation back to an unhindered fellowship, this is external.

>>In Scripture, the term bitterness, is never used as being justified, never okay, it is always wrong. Bitterness and internal resentment are a state of the heart and is a state of hatred and malice towards another. It is in essence, the spiritual murder of Matt. 5:21-22. These thoughts of malice and bitterness are always wrong. Bitterness is the state of the heart, an attitude of unforgiveness that is always wrong.

>>Forgiveness also speaks of not the state of the heart, but the state of your relationship with another. It is synonymous with the term “broken relationship.” Broken relationships are not wholesale condemned in the New Testament. Some examples of legitimate broken relationships in Scripture: 1) Acts 15:36-41, Paul and Barnabas over John Mark. 2) John with Diotrephes, 3 Jn. 9-10. 3) With unrepentant believers in the church, Matt. 18:17, 1 Cor. 5:1-11, 2 Cor. 2:6-7 (restoration after repentance), Eph. 5:11, 1 Thess. 5:14, 2 Thess. 3:6, 1 Tim. 1:20, 5:19-20, 2 Tim. 3:5, Titus 3:9-11, 2 Jn 10. There are times in which a broken relationship is the right thing. The burden of proof is on the one who denies disproving each and every one of these texts. Together they provide a formidable challenge that the Bible doesn't teach that all relationships must be repaired at all costs. There can't be intimacy and closeness that describes the life of believers in Christ unless the Lord brings repentance. The unrepentant believer is removed from the body to drive them to repentance. Forgiveness in this state of the relationship may or may not be possible depending on the circumstances.

2) **God's Pattern of Forgiveness:** Eph. 4:32, “in the same manner,” means the manner in which God forgives you. Not a sentimental, guilt trip but forgiveness based in repentance. John the Baptist and Jesus both preached repentance, see also Luke 13:3. Acts 3:19, Peter preached, “Repent.” “[G]odly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation,” 2 Cor. 7:10. There is no salvation without repentance. It is God's kindness that leads us to repentance, Romans 2:4. Sorrow is involved but it is not proof of forgiveness. Repent is a physical word, it means to turn- once headed one way, now headed the other. It is a change in loyalty from sin to God. It is required for salvation that you change your loyalty to your sin, it is not works based salvation. It is a change in loyalty. You cannot turn to Christ without turning away from sin. Mk. 2:16 shows that Jesus calls those who knew they were unrighteous and needed a Savior. The self-righteous wouldn't repent and turn from sin and be saved. Repentance is based in the shed blood of Christ, based upon the repentance of a humble sinner.

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- 3) **The Faulty Theology of Penance**: penance is an external act or series of acts that seeks to pay for sin. It makes no reference to the attitude of the heart or an improved behavior. Illegitimate sources of sorrow include:
 - a. Displays of emotion
 - b. Acts of service
 - c. Gifts: Is. 2:5-22, God is disgusted by gifts from unrepentant people.
 - d. Time: it does not resolve issues because repentance never happened. An example is that Hell is a place of eternal punishment. Time does not heal all wounds. Penance is a form of selfishness to avoid dealing with unrepentant sin. Penance is wanting another person to feel good about me.
- 4) **Forgiveness is Based in Repentance**: There are (7) lines of evidence that show forgiveness is based in repentance, not in the passing of time, nor the giving of gifts, not in performing acts of service, or feeling or displaying emotion.
 - 1) **Forgiveness Follows Repentance**, Luke 17:3-4, "if he repents," then forgive. The primary lesson in this passage is that forgiveness should follow repentance. If there is repentance, then forgive (restore the relationship).
 - 2) **Repentance not the same as saying, "I'm sorry."** It is not a substitute for repentance.
 - 3) **The Biblical Principle that "love covers sin," is not implying forgiveness without repentance**: passages such as Pro. 10:12, 17:9, and 1 Pet. 4:8 seem to imply that I should restore the relationship whether repentance happens or not. Two angles to this: 1) You have the option of graciously covering sin. Wisdom would not dictate that letting a longstanding and verifiable pattern of sin continue. It is not loving to the offender to let this go. Not for the purpose of perfection but a recalcitrant and arrogant attitude to sinful pattern cannot be ignored. You can't compel someone to restore a relationship based on anything other than repentance. 2) A closer look at the context of the three main passages of Pro. 10:12, 17:9 and 1 Pet. 4:8 tell a different story.
 - a. **Prov. 10:12**: the context is the love covers the offense by not immediately making it public.
 - b. **Prov. 17:9**: this passage is not speaking about unconditional forgiveness without repentance but is the first half of a warning to not be a gossip and slanderer which would separate friends.
 - c. **1 Pet. 4:8**: is a general proverb that love covers sin. This is the doctrine of atonement. God covers sin based upon the atonement of Christ and repentance of sin or as Paul says in Eph. 4:32, "as God in Christ forgave you."
 - d. **None of these examples argue for: Forgive a verifiable pattern of sin with no condition of repentance.**
 - 4) **The Structure of Church Discipline is Based in Repentance and Forgiveness**: Matt. 18:15, 2 Thess. 3:14, do not associate with him so that he will be put to shame (to repent or turn, drive them back to fellowship)
 - 5) **Lack of Examples of Unconditional Forgiveness in the New Testament**: Not one of example of Jesus, Peter, James, John or Paul, exhorting believers to unconditional forgiveness.

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>>Emotions are not a Bible study method and feelings are not loftier than Scripture.

6) **No Examples in New Testament of Penance or Gift Giving Being a Legitimate Substitute for Repentance.** Acts 8, Simon the Sorcerer tried to offer money in exchange for the Holy Spirit and a right standing with God. He was rebuked for thinking that salvation can be purchased.

7) **Repentance is Necessary in Christian Life for Sanctification:** They relate to one another as the Christian proactively is working on Christlikeness by the power of the Spirit, Phil. 2:12-13. It is the person working outwardly what God is working inwardly.

What does it look like? 6 Examples from Scripture:

- 1) **The Daily Sins of Life:** Luke 17:3, the assumption that repentance is genuine, this text isn't the one stop shop that details what has taken place. This is the soft heart of the one being asked to forgive being willing to do so. This passage doesn't describe the conversations that happen between the one offended and the one asking for forgiveness throughout the day.
- 2) **King David in Psalm 51 after Committing Murder and Adultery:** V3, he needed to be transparent and honest, V4, David needed to acknowledge that God was the offended party. V5, David needed to acknowledge his sin nature. V8, David joyfully received the discipline of the Lord. V13, David needed to recommit to a holy life worthy of imitating and teaching unbelievers.
- 3) **Zacchaeus in Luke 19:** Jesus called him down and invited Himself to his house. 4 Things that Makes this phenomenal repentance:
 - 1) V8, Zacheus stopped or "stands" before the Lord in public. Addressed Jesus as Lord & Master,
 - 2) Announces to immediately give ½ of his goods to the poor and return 4X to those he stole from. V7, the crowd grumbled at what they were hearing.
 - 3) Zacchaeus just didn't desire to obey the Law out of his love for the Lord, but wanted to be sure that everyone knew that his repentance was genuine. Lev. 6:5, & Num. 5:7, detail that if something is stolen from a fellow Jew, he was to restore what was stolen plus 20%. Zacchaeus instituted a 300% penalty upon himself.
 - 4) He uses present, active indicative verbs. It means that he is doing something right now to show repentance. He is repairing what was wrong towards others. Jesus responds, "Today salvation has come to your house."
- 4) **The Sinful Woman of Luke 7:36.** The immoral woman who was overcome with her own sin. She wipes His feet with her hair. She was not holding back but was humble.
- 5) **Another Repentant Tax Collector of Luke 18:9-14:** Two men who went to the temple to pray, one who felt self-righteous and the other was humiliated with their sin.
- 6) **Saul the Persecutor of the Church:** Acts 9:1-9, stunned that he was persecuting Christ. He never forgot his past although speaking of the freedom in Christ, Rom. 8:1. 1 Cor. 15:9, Gal. 1:13, he remembered his former life and even called himself the least of the apostles.

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- 7) Paul in Acts 23:1-3, he is struck on the face and unknowingly rebukes the High Priest of Israel. V4, those standing confronted Paul of reviling the high priest and it grieves him and he quotes the Scripture he violated and repents. He didn't use the fact he was unjustly struck as an excuse to sin.

Summary:

- Can you hold bitterness and hatred in your heart? No.
- Are you to extend forgiveness, the restoration of relationship, immediately upon repentance? Yes.
- Can you make a decision to show grace? Absolutely with wisdom and discernment.
- Can you be compelled to restore a relationship without the presence of repentance? No, you can't.
- Is there any other basis for forgiveness other than repentance? No.
- What does this have to do with the power of grace? "Forgive us our debts." It is in prayer that the power to ask forgiveness from God and find strength to be able to forgive others as God in Christ has forgiven me. It says that the Gospel has so permeated my life that I wouldn't hold bitterness and resentment in my heart. Grace towards me from God compels grace towards others.
- The grace that you show to those around reflects the overwhelming eternal grace based in repentance that God has shown us in Christ.

Further Discussion and Application

Romans 2:4 and 2 Tim. 2:25, detail the kindness of God to lead us to repentance. How has His kindness graced us to reconcile relationships in our homes, lives, and in the church? Why does repentance have to be granted to us? Why does dealing with sin in our lives and a brother's life require so much humility? How can pride stop repentance?

Paul's example is one that is hard to reconcile when he rebuked the High Priest. Who do we offend when we sin? How is God's sovereignty displayed in all situations we encounter in life? What is God's desire for His people according to Romans 8:28-30?

What are the resulting actions of those of whom demonstrated genuine repentance detailed in the 6 examples above?

How has study of this topic changed your heart and understanding of Biblical forgiveness?