

MISUNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

Article 2

This is the second teaching article in the series on the subjects of forgiveness and reconciliation. In the first article, we addressed one of the most common misunderstandings about forgiving another of his sins:

<p>Misunderstanding #1</p>	<p>When I forgive, I must forget (remove the offense from memory)</p>	<p>Nowhere does Scripture require you to have a blank memory about your own sins or sins committed against you. In fact, the memory of certain sins (even though these sins have been forgiven by God) is important for your training in righteousness, to help you not repeat them (<i>for example, notice God's record and David's remembrance of his sins in II Samuel 12:13-23</i>). This is tremendous hope, because you can forgive, even though you may not be able to erase from memory that the other person sinned against you. (<i>Please read the previous article in the series on forgiveness for a more complete explanation</i>)</p>
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In this article, we will examine misunderstandings about releasing the guilty person from the consequences of his sin.

Misunderstanding #2: When I forgive, I must release the guilty person from all the consequences of his sin.

Receiving God's forgiveness does not guarantee that all the consequences of your wrongdoing will be removed. For example, even though the Lord forgave David for his adultery with Bathsheba (*II Samuel 12:13*), the child that was born out of the adulterous relationship died. This happened because David, through his adultery, gave occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme (*II Samuel 12:14-23*). The thief on the cross, although forgiven by Jesus, still died (*Luke 23:40-43*).

It is important to distinguish between forgiveness and the release from consequences (physical). Forgiveness is an act of grace that reestablishes a right relationship with the offender. In other words, there is no longer an estrangement between the offender and the one who has had the sin committed against him. On the other hand, consequences often serve as an encouragement and a reminder to the offender to change. Facing the consequences also helps the one who has sinned to show the seriousness of his commitment to change (*as exemplified by Zaccheus in Luke 16:8*).

Sometimes, it is also appropriate to release the person from the consequences (*based on Matthew 18:23-35; Luke 7:41-43*). There is no set formula or command for when release from consequences is appropriate; the decision must be made uniquely for each circumstance.

When we forgive, we are not to remind the forgiven person of his sin in an accusing manner, even though it may not be appropriate to release the offender from all the consequences of his sin. (The only reason to remind

anyone of his sins is for restoration or teaching purposes, and even then it must be done in a spirit of gentleness). Sadly, many who hold a person responsible for the consequences of his sin continue to treat the person with scorn, seeking to exercise vengeance. Scripture never excuses us from treating people with love (see *1 Corinthians 13:4-8a*; *Ephesians 4:32*) even when difficult situations must be addressed.

To understand this in a practical way, let's consider the following examples:

Parents, when they forgive their children, are to restore their children to a right relationship (the spiritual aspect), but they may still need to hold their children responsible for the wrongs (the physical aspect). Discipline may still be necessary, and the child may need to do whatever is necessary for his ongoing training for maturity. If, for instance, the child has damaged a family vehicle through recklessness, the parents are to forgive him, and are to be restored in their relationship with him. However, this does not mean that the child is released from the necessary discipline, or from the responsibility for the repair of the car.

Similarly, let's suppose that an employee steals from his company. Other co-workers witness the theft and report it to their manager, a true believer in Christ. When the manager confronts the person about the allegation of theft, the person admits the crime, says he will not do it again, and asks for forgiveness for violating the manager's trust. The manager forgives him and counsels him not to do it again. (If the employee is a believer, the manager counsels him regarding "put-offs" and "put-ons," renews fellowship, and admonishes him not to steal again). The manager knows that he must file a report about this situation with his supervisors and does so. Those in authority review the situation and decide to place the employee on probation. The manager discusses his options concerning the employee with his supervisors. After this consultation, two things are decided for the job: (1) the employee is transferred to another department with job restrictions that are appropriate to the confessed theft, and (2) a payment schedule is worked out so that the employee can make restitution for his theft. The treatment of the person is to be with grace, kindness, and tenderheartedness, and with the view to do what is good for him (*based on Romans 12:14-21; Ephesians 4:31-32; 1 Peter 3:10-12*). Holding the person responsible for his sin and administering physical consequences is good for his spiritual maturity.

There are always consequences to sinning; some are more far-reaching, public, or long-term than others. Sometimes, the sinner may be released from the physical consequences of his sin, but at other times, the loving thing to do may be to hold him responsible. In demonstrating forgiveness toward the one who has sinned, it may even be important to help him face the consequences, for his good. Doing what is good for the one who has sinned sometimes includes helping him to see the seriousness of his wrongdoing, and to help him through the restoration process. However, it is not enough to simply administer the physical consequences of sin. Remember that discipleship/counseling is not complete until the repentant one has been restored back to a righteous pattern of life (*based on Hebrews 12:11*).

*Portions of this article are excerpted from Lessons 12 and 13 of the **Self-Confrontation** manual.*