

# Sermon: Understanding Forgiveness

Text: [Ephesians 1:7; 4:25-32 \(ESV\)](#)

Gary L. Wackler

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**Texts:** [Ephesians 1:7 \(ESV\)](#) 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,

[Ephesians 4:25-32 \(ESV\)](#) 25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. 26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil. 28 Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. 29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

**Introduction:** Not every sermon I preach is necessarily for everyone, but this one is! It is critical that everyone here know how to forgive and then do it. Forgiveness is a requirement for salvation as we interact with people and God. Some of you here today have been hurt physically by others, sexually abused, and deserted by husbands or wives. Children have disappointed, parents who don't understand, companies who were cold and heartless in how they dealt with you, and people who have lied to you and about you. A lot of people need to be forgiven.

None of us is perfect. We have all done things that are wrong. We have all said things for which we are sorry. Forgiveness is the cornerstone for building close relationships. This is true in our families, at church, at work, in our neighborhoods, and most importantly with God.

Forgiveness carries with it the idea of releasing or setting a person (prisoner) free. Many times the concept is found in the area of money or debt, like being released from a financial obligation. In many ways the idea of "forgiveness" is equated with conversion and one's salvation.

It is critical that we understand forgiveness because we are commanded to forgive one another just as (in Christ) God forgave you ([Ephesians 4:32](#)).

Wouldn't it be great to have all your debts just wiped out? You're one of the new millionaires because you hit the lottery or entered a random contest online. Or maybe, a rich uncle just died and left you his multi-million-dollar estate, but forgiveness depends on a number of conditions.

## I. Forgiveness Depends on a Changed Attitude.

We can certainly have a bad attitude about forgiveness, and there are things that can prevent forgiveness:

1. Stubborn (unrepentant) - immoral lifestyle

In the Parable of the Sower in **Mark 4:12** there is a quote from **Isaiah 6:9-10** **Mark 4:12 (ESV)** 12 so that ““they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.””

Forgiveness depends on a changed attitude/mind:

2. Unbelief prevents forgiveness.
3. Denial of wrongdoing is not helpful.

You might hear: “I’m a good person. What do I need church for?” But Scripture is clear about that kind of self-analysis for even Christians.

**I John 1:8-10 (ESV)** 8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Forgiveness Depends on a Changed Attitude

4. Refusal to forgive others will prevent forgiveness.

**Matthew 6:14-15 (ESV)** 14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Forgiveness Depends on a Changed Attitude which results in:

- A. Repentance - and that comes because of faith

- B. Confession - that comes because of conviction
- C. Baptism, and the person submits out of obedience promoted by love

## II. Forgiveness Depends on a Forgetful God.

- A. Not a sign of senility or weakness

**Exodus 34:6-7 (ESV)** 6 The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 7 keeping steadfast love for thousands [a], forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.” **Footnotes: Exodus 34:7 Or to the thousandth generation**

Really all this talk about depending is a little misleading. When God forgives he does forget. “To love conditionally is against God’s nature” (Lucado).

But we are different. Richard Foster in his book on *Prayer* puts it this way. “Forgiveness does not mean that we will forget. That would do violence to our rational faculties. Helmut Thielicke, a German pastor who endured the darkest days of the Nazi Third Reich, says, “One should never mention the words ‘forgive’ and ‘forget’ in the same breath.” No, we remember, but in forgiving we no longer use the memory against others.

Forgiveness is not pretending that the offense did not really matter. It did matter, and it does matter, and there is no use pretending otherwise. The offense is real, but when we forgive, the offense no longer controls our behavior.

Forgiveness is not acting as if things are just the same as before the offense. We must face the facts that things will never be the same. But by the grace of God they can be a thousand times better, yet they will never again be the same.

What then is forgiveness? It is a miracle of grace whereby the offense no longer separates.

If a husband ignores his wife, valuing business and all other things above her, he has sinned against her. The offense is real, and the hurt is real. A sacred trust has been broken. We speak rightly when we say that something has come between them. She will never forget this violation of respect. Even in old age she may feel an icy chill at the memory of this disregard.

But forgiveness means that this real and horrible offense shall not separate us. Forgiveness means that we will no longer use the offense to drive a wedge between us, hurting and injuring one another. Forgiveness means that the power of love that holds us together is greater than the power of the offense that separates us. That is forgiveness. In forgiveness we are releasing our offenders so that they are no longer bound to us. In a very real sense we are freeing them to receive God's grace. We are also inviting our offenders back into the circle of fellowship. (pages 187-88)

**Forgiveness depends on:**

**B. An act of love and mercy**

**Psalm 25:7-11 (ESV)** 7 Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O Lord! 8 Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. 9 He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. 10 All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies. 11 For your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my guilt, for it is great.

Also in **Isaiah 43:25 (ESV)** God speaks: 25 "I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.

If we look good, God looks good. If we are good, God is praised and honored because of our faithfulness.

### **III. Forgiveness Depends on a Sacrifice.**

**A. In the O.T., the Day of Atonement only postponed deserved punishment.**

*Yom Kippur* or the Day of Atonement was a time for yearly sacrifice being made for the sins of the people. These sacrifices only covered the sins of the people for the previous year. The sacrifices had to be repeated year after year. It only postponed the inevitable.

**B. In the N.T., Calvary eliminates the necessity for the punishment of everyone once for all.**

**Hebrews 9:24-28 (ESV)** 24 For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. 25 Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, 26 for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. 27 And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, 28 so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

You see God can take bad and turn it into good. He can take a bad past and create a great present and even better future. The cross stands as a vivid example of good coming from bad.

The writer of Romans tells us that **Romans 8:28 (ESV)** 28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good,[a] for those who are called according to his purpose.

**Footnotes:** **Romans 8:28** Some manuscripts God works all things together for good, or God works in all things for the good

Some of you behind your smiles have pasts and even a present that is painful - God can forgive and bring healing - if only you will in good faith ask Him.

“Forgiveness is the fragrance the violet sheds on the heel that has crushed it.”  
-Mark Twain

God sent His Son to die for you so that you might be forgiven - released from the penalty of sin. Just like within the O.T. system we are viewed as a community and we pray for holiness and forgiveness corporately. “Forgive us *our* debts as we also have forgiven *our* debtors.” - **Matthew 6:12 (ESV)**

**Conclusion:** Forgiveness is not the acceptance of sin (**Romans 6:1ff**). It is the restoration of a repentant sinner. -GLW. Repentance and forgiveness walk hand in hand and work in tandem.

The Church in **I Corinthians 5** could not tolerate an adulterer in their midst until he repented.

**Question:** Why would the Church be so hard on one of its own members?

**Answer:** Because the adulterer no longer had the same purpose or goal: that is to do everything to “the praise of His glory.”

Grace is unconditional. God’s love is always extended to us even when we are sinners. But forgiveness must always be conditional upon our response. The sweetest sound in Scripture for me is found in **Romans 8:1 (ESV)** 1There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.[a]

**Footnotes:** **Romans 8:1** Some manuscripts add who walk not according to the flesh (but according to the Spirit)

Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, p.322ff) “The community of the saints (the Church) is not an “ideal” community consisting of perfect and sinless men and women, where there is no need of further repentance. No, it is a community which proves that it is worthy of the gospel of forgiveness by constantly and sincerely proclaiming God’s forgiveness (which has nothing to do with self-forgiveness). It is a community of men and women who have genuinely encountered the precious grace of God, and who walk worthily of the gospel by not casting that grace recklessly away.”

You are worth it all. God sent His Son to die for you so that you might have the possibility of forgiveness and be released from sin’s penalty (death). Forgiveness allows an approach to God minus fear. Forgiveness from God is for the past, but also for the future. Punishment and fear of Hell is gone and replaced by LOVE. If we are forgiven and know it, that will make a big difference in how we live. Expectations can change the future.

In the 1960’s a teacher was given a roster showing the actual I.Q. test scores of the students in one class, and for another class a roster in which the I.Q. column had been mistakenly filled in with the student’s locker numbers. The teacher assumed that the locker numbers were the actual I.Q.s of the students when the rosters were posted at the beginning of the semester. After a year it was discovered that in the first class the students with high actual I.Q. scores had performed better than those with low ones. But in the second class the students with higher locker numbers scored significantly higher than those with lower locker numbers.

(p.32, *Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life*).

**If locker numbers can do it, so can guilt brought on by Christians expecting perfection from others.**

**Ruth Graham once said - “It’s up to me to love Billy and up to God to make him good.”**

**Can you just imagine what could happen in an atmosphere of praise, forgiveness, and high expectations - loving each other the way God loves us?**

**Jesus invites you to accept His gracious offer of peace with Him and the Father.**

**Won’t you become a part of this forgiven community (His Body: the Church), today?**

**Your salvation depends on it!**