

A Brief Explanation of Biblical Forgiveness

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As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.

—Ps 103:12

When one examines the Word of God, he finds that God is a “forgiving God” (Ex 34:6-7; Num 14:18; Ps 99:8; Eph 4:32) who does not “remember sins any more” (Isa 43:25; Heb 8:12). The forgiveness of God serves as a model for how we as His people should forgive one another (Col 3:13; Eph 4:32; Matt 18:35). In an age where resentment, revenge, retaliation, and returning insult for insult abounds and, in fact, is glorified, what is biblical forgiveness?

Biblical forgiveness is a **promise of pardon**. That is, when one forgives someone, biblically speaking, he makes the following three promises to that person:

1. I promise to not bring this sin up to YOU again.

Just as far as the east is from the west, so far has God removed our sins from us (Ps 103:12). God promises that the sin is removed from us and has removed them far from us so that He will not hold us accountable for our sins. God does this because He forgave us because He crushed His Son, Jesus Christ, in our place. He removed our sins and the penalty those sins deserve by placing them – all of them – on Christ two thousand years ago. So then, God will not bring up sins to us or hold us accountable for our sins (cf. Heb 7:25). So then, when we forgive others we must affirm that we will not remind *them* of their sins. True forgiveness will not say: “But yesterday you did...” or “You *always* do...” or “You never....” True love “keeps no record of wrongs” (1 Cor 13:5). Thus, true forgiveness promises to pardon sin and thus not bring that sin up to the person again.

2. I promise to not bring this sin up to OTHERS.

God does not speak of all our sins to others. He does not broadcast all our faults and sins of omission and commission on heaven’s big-screen! They are all removed and forgiven (Ps 130:4). This is true biblical forgiveness. When we forgive others, we then promise to not mention the sin to others. If we were to mention it to others, we would then be guilty of the sin of slander or gossip (Ps 15:3; Prov 25:9). In fact, he who spreads slander is a fool (Prov 10:9). This is the very deed that God commands believers to put off in sanctification (Eph 4:31). When we forgive, we must in essence say “I forgive you and I will make a deliberate choice to not bring this sin up to others.” This eliminates such conversation such as: “Did you hear that ____ did...” or “Can you believe that ____ said....” Thus, true forgiveness promises to pardon sin and not mention the offense to other people.

3. I promise not to rehearse this sin to MYSELF again.

God says to His people: “I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more” (Jer 31:34). This is reiterated in the NT as well (Heb 8:12; 10:17). God who is sovereignly omniscient (‘all knowing’) cannot ‘forget’ anything. But this means that He *actively chooses* not to remember the offense and thus hold it against us. He does not rehearse over and over again in his mind what we have done. Because Christ died for us and bore our wrath, God chooses to not rehearse our sins to Himself. And this is what our forgiveness must look like. When we forgive we cannot say in our hearts: “Man, I cannot believe that he did...” or “I would never do that!” Thus, true forgiveness promises to pardon sin and actively, deliberately, and carefully chooses to not rehearse the offense of another in my own heart and mind.