

# FORGIVENESS: HOW LORD?

## BY LOVING OBEDIENCE



## **Forgiveness — How, LORD? By Loving Obedience!**

Forgiveness is one of the most difficult commands the LORD has ever given His people, not because it is unclear, but because it reaches into wounds that have never fully healed. Many believers sincerely desire to obey God, yet find themselves unable to forgive. They are not rebellious. They are hurt. They are confused. And often, they have been taught verses about forgiveness without being taught how those verses fit together.

Over the years, I have spoken with people after church services who admitted, sometimes with tears, that they could not forgive someone. They were not proud of it. They were burdened by it. They felt condemned by certain passages and confused by others. They wanted to please the LORD, but they did not know how to forgive without feeling that they were denying the pain they had endured.

This booklet exists to bring clarity where confusion has lived for too long. Forgiveness in Scripture is not shallow, careless, or unsafe. It is wise, truthful, loving, and obedient. When rightly understood, it frees the heart without enabling sin, and it restores peace without denying justice.

Jesus spoke about forgiveness in a context where sin was taken seriously. In Luke 17, He began by warning His disciples that offenses would come and that causing others to stumble was no small matter. Sin damages people. It damages relationships. And it damages fellowship. Forgiveness does not pretend that sin did not happen. It begins by acknowledging that it did.

Jesus then gave a clear instruction. “If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.” These words immediately confront a common misunderstanding. Forgiveness does not bypass truth. Love does not remain silent in the face of sin. Rebuke, when done rightly, is not cruelty. It is care. It names the wrong so that healing can begin. Yet Jesus also made forgiveness conditional in this relational sense.

“If he repents, forgive him.”

Repentance matters.

Forgiveness that restores fellowship is not automatic. It follows repentance. Without repentance, there can be no restoration of trust, no reconciliation, and no rebuilding of what sin has broken.

This is not harsh.

It is biblical.

Jesus went even further.

“If he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.” Forgiveness is not limited by frequency. It is limited only by the presence or absence of repentance. Where repentance is real, forgiveness must also be real.

This kind of forgiveness is not sentimental.

It is deliberate.

It is discerning.

It is obedient.

The disciples immediately felt the weight of what Jesus had said. “And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.” They did not argue with Him. They did not resist His words. They understood exactly what He was asking, and they knew it was beyond their natural ability.

Forgiveness of this kind could not be produced by emotion or willpower. It required dependence. Jesus answered them, but not in the way they expected. “If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed...” He did not say they needed more faith. He told them that what they already possessed was sufficient. The issue was not the size of their faith, but the source of their obedience.

Forgiveness does not flow from emotional readiness. It flows from trusting obedience. Jesus then continued, not by changing subjects, but by completing His teaching. He spoke of a servant returning from the field after a long day's work. The servant had already labored. Yet the master did not praise him or release him from duty. The servant was expected to continue serving. Jesus' point was not about harsh masters. It was about expectation. Servants obey because obedience defines who they are. Forgiveness belongs in that category. When Jesus said, "We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do," He was not diminishing obedience. He was removing pride and excuse at the same time.

Forgiveness does not earn praise. Forgiveness does not put God in our debt. Forgiveness does not make us heroic. It means we have obeyed. Many believers struggle because they treat forgiveness as something extraordinary rather than something expected. They wait until they feel strong enough, healed enough, or spiritual enough. Jesus teaches otherwise.

Forgiveness is not about readiness. It is about obedience. And obedience, when rightly understood, is loving obedience. This brings us to another passage that has troubled many believers. "But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

At first glance, this verse sounds frightening. Many have wondered if their salvation is at risk when forgiveness feels impossible. But Jesus is not speaking about salvation here. He is speaking to those who already know God as Father. This is a family matter, not a courtroom matter. Unforgiveness does not remove salvation. It disrupts fellowship.

Jesus was teaching that an unforgiving heart hinders communion with God. When bitterness is cherished, prayer is affected. When resentment is guarded, intimacy suffers. God does not stop loving His child. But fellowship is strained.

This forgiveness is different from the forgiveness that restores human relationships. This is forgiveness before God, the release of bitterness, vengeance, and hatred in the heart. It is commanded whether repentance from others has occurred or not. Here is the key distinction that brings peace. Forgiveness before God releases the heart. Repentance restores the relationship.

These two truths do not compete. They complete one another. God Himself models this perfectly. His heart is always open to forgive, yet restored fellowship follows repentance. Mercy and holiness walk together. We are called to follow His pattern.

### **Father Forgive Them**

One of the clearest demonstrations of this truth was spoken by Jesus from the cross. “Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” These words are often misunderstood. Some have assumed that Jesus forgave everyone involved in His crucifixion without repentance. Others have concluded that forgiveness requires no accountability. Neither conclusion is faithful to Scripture.

The key phrase in Jesus’ prayer is this: “for they know not what they do.” Jesus did not deny guilt. He did not excuse sin. He identified ignorance as the defining condition of His prayer. The Roman soldiers who crucified Him acted in ignorance. They carried out orders without understanding who He was or what the cross meant. The crowd, stirred by deception and pressure, followed leaders they trusted without fully understanding what they were doing. Scripture later confirms this. “And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.” Even real guilt can still be ignorance in God’s accounting.

But there was another group present. The religious leaders had seen His works, heard His words, and knowingly rejected Him. Jesus said of them,

“now they have no cloak for their sin.” Ignorance did not apply to all.

Jesus’ prayer from the cross was not a declaration of universal forgiveness. It was an act of forgiveness before God. From the cross, Jesus released vengeance, entrusted judgment to the Father, and expressed mercy where ignorance existed. But restored fellowship still required repentance. Forgiveness before God opened the door. Repentance was still the path.

Jesus practiced exactly what He taught. And He invites us to do the same. For the believer, this truth is freeing. We are not required to deny sin. We are not required to pretend harm did not occur. We are not required to restore trust where repentance is absent. But we are commanded to release bitterness before God.

If forgiveness feels heavy, the disciples’ prayer becomes ours. “Lord, increase our faith.” And the LORD gently reminds us that faith need not be great, only obedient. Forgiveness is not an act of spiritual greatness. It is an act of loving obedience.

### **A Prayer for a Released Heart**

Father,

I come before You, not to excuse what was done to me,  
and not to pretend that the hurt did not matter.

You know the wound.

You know the words, the actions, and the lasting pain.

But today, I come to You because I no longer want to carry bitterness in my heart.

You have shown me that forgiveness before You releases the heart,  
even when repentance from others has not yet come.

I do not ask You to call evil good.  
I ask You to take from me what has weighed me down for too long.  
As Your Son prayed from the cross,  
I place this matter into Your hands.

I release the desire for vengeance.  
I release the need to rehearse the wrong.  
I release the bitterness that has quietly taken root within me.

I forgive before You.

I entrust justice, truth, and accountability to You alone,  
for You judge righteously and show mercy perfectly.

Give me a clean heart.  
Guard me from returning to bitterness.  
Teach me to walk in loving obedience, not because it is easy,  
but because You are worthy.

If repentance and restoration come,  
grant me wisdom to walk in truth and grace.  
Until then, let my heart remain free before You.

I rest this matter in Your care.

Amen, Lord.

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