

Chapter 5

Forgiving Ends These Problems

Jesus Can Set You Free

Forgiveness Is Essential

We have seen that "judging" is what plants the bitter roots in our heart that causes us to have bad fruit in our lives. This is a serious condition, and we need a way to be set free from the influence of these bitter roots. Forgiving and being forgiven by God is the cure. It is the only way that the bitter root is pulled out and replaced by a good root, which is the presence of Jesus in us.

God has told us a great deal about why forgiveness is essential.

1. Forgiveness is important because God said so. Jesus is the only Judge of the universe. When we judge, we attempt to take His place.¹ God is not happy about this.
2. Forgiveness is important for us. When we judge another, we sin and this plants a bitter root in our heart. This bitter root will produce bad fruit. There is only one cure for this, and that is the blood of Jesus. He shed His blood to take away our sins. We need His blood to wash away this sin of judging so we don't have to reap the resulting consequences that come about from the operation of God's laws. The only way to accomplish this is to forgive (from our heart) the one who wounded us, and then to be forgiven by Jesus.

Forgiveness is the only way we can be changed into the image of Jesus.

¹ See **Endnote #5-1** for more about letting Jesus be the judge.

When He forgives us, He pays the debt we owe in the spiritual realm, and we are set free from the consequences we would otherwise have to pay for our debt.² If we don't forgive (from our heart), we won't be forgiven by God (though this sin will not send us to hell).³ If we are not forgiven by God, we will continue to do the things we hate (we will continue to experience the reaping from the operation of God's laws). There simply is no other way to be set free.⁴

The consequences of sin are so overwhelmingly too large for us to stop that we need something from outside the natural course of this world to set us free: in other words, a miracle.⁵ What Jesus does for us when He provides forgiveness of sin is such a miracle. It is a legal transaction that occurs in the spiritual realm, and it washes away the debt we owe and removes the bitter root inside us. Once the bitter root has been removed, and Jesus has moved into that place in our heart, good fruit begins to grow from this new good root.⁶

What Does It Mean To Forgive?

There are two common obstacles that often make it difficult for us to forgive. The first obstacle is that we misunderstand what God meant by "forgive." "Forgive" is a word that is so common among Christians that we think we know what it means. However, most of us were taught what this word means by the world around us, and so the meaning we have attached to it may not be the same as what God is referring to when He

² **Galatians 1:3-4**, *Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.*

Hebrews 9:28, *so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many.*

1 John 2:2, *And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.*

³ **Matthew 18:35**, *"So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."*

Mark 11:25, *"And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses."*

Luke 6:37, *"Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven."*

Ephesians 4:32, *And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you.*

⁴ See **Endnote #5-2** for more on the great power of forgiveness.

⁵ The biblical concept of a miracle is that of an event which runs counter to the observed processes of nature (Elwell, [Evangelical Dictionary of Theology](#), p.723).

⁶ See Matthew 12:33-35 and Luke 6:43-45.

tells us to forgive.⁷ Sometimes this misunderstanding gets in the way of our being able to forgive others in the process of our healing.

For instance, many of us have heard something like, "Forgive and forget." We try to do that, and we find we can't forget what the person did to us. Then we think we haven't forgiven. Or perhaps somebody has hurt us, and we may believe that forgiving means we need to again make ourselves vulnerable to that person. Then something inside us resists forgiving, because we are sure the person will wound us again. Then we find it difficult to forgive.

However, God loves you and He will not ask you to do something that is not good for you, or is dangerous or destructive to you. Once you understand what God meant when He told you to forgive, you will find it much easier to forgive from your heart. Your misunderstanding of what it means to forgive may have been keeping you in bondage.

What Forgiveness Is NOT

Forgiveness is **not** the following:⁸

1. It is not saying the person did not transgress or hurt us, when he or she in fact did.
2. It is not relieving the other person of their responsibility, such as making excuses for their actions. For example, "My parents couldn't help it," or "They did the best they could," or "I'd have done the same thing if I had been in their shoes."
3. It is not forgetting what the other person did. We can't forget, but the hurt can be removed from the memory, and we can be forgiven for our judging.
4. It is not trusting the other person again when he or she is still unsafe – becoming vulnerable to the person again may not be wise.
5. It is not a "feeling." Rather, forgiving is a decision. However, when forgiveness has been accomplished we will feel differently about the other person whenever we think of them.
6. It is not saying or pretending we weren't hurt and/or that we weren't angry; or ignoring the hurt feeling because we aren't supposed to be angry. Rather, we need to process our feelings, not suppress them.

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See **Endnote #5-3** for definition of the word "forgive."

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Adapted from Easterday, see Bibliography.

What Forgiveness IS

Forgiveness is deciding not to hold the other person in debt.⁹ Unforgiveness says, "You unjustly hurt me, and you owe me a debt. I will make you pay." Forgiveness says, "Even though you hurt me and owe me a debt, I am writing it off. You owe me nothing. It is not my place to make you pay, and I release you to the judgment of Jesus. He is the just Judge, and He will rightly decide the case. If there is any penalty, He will collect it."¹⁰ Forgiveness does not say, "Go get 'em, God. You make him pay." Such a statement clearly reveals bitterness still lodged in the heart.

A Second Obstacle To Forgiving

In addition to misunderstanding what forgiveness really is, there may be a second obstacle to forgiving. We may fear that if we give up our resentment we won't be protected. We may believe that a wall of resentment will protect us. This is, of course, a lie. Holding the resentment causes us to suffer. As I will discuss in a later chapter (Chapter 8, "That It May Go Well With You," which is about honoring parents), we perceive God in the same way that we perceive our parents. If they were protecting and nurturing, it will be easy for us to see God in this way. However, if they were neglectful, or unloving, or mean, or abusive, there will be a deep sense in us that all authorities are this way, including God. When our parents were this way, we had to look out for ourselves and be our own protector. Later in life we will then struggle with trusting God to be our protector. But in reality, He is the only one who can protect us.

⁹ Grace means: "graciousness (as gratifying) of manner or act (abstract or concrete) literally, figuratively, or spiritually; especially the divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life: including gratitude" (Strong's, p.77). The second meaning of the verb is to forgive! (C. Brown, The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Vol 2, p.122).

It appears that when we forgive, we are connecting with (or acting like, or coming into unity with) God's nature rather than man's nature (the tendency to respond to perceived wounding with bitterness, judgment, and blame).

". . . 'dead through our trespasses, made alive together with Christ, by grace (*chariti*) you have been saved' (2:5); 'by grace . . . through faith . . . the gift of God' in opposition to 'not your own doing . . . not because of works, lest any man should boast' (2.8f)" (C. Brown, Vol 2, p.122, commenting on Ephesians 2:5-2:8ff).

¹⁰ **Romans 12:19**, *Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay" says the Lord. Therefore if your enemy hungers, feed him; if he thirsts, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.*

We Are The Ones Who Suffer

If we do not forgive, we are the ones who suffer. God is a just judge, which means that no one ever gets away with anything, ever, anywhere. Not everyone believes this, but it is true. The law of God is inescapable, and whatever we sow, we will surely reap,

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap (Galatians 6:7).¹¹

Remove Bitter Roots Immediately!

Bitter roots are easier to eradicate if we remove them soon after they are planted. The longer they are allowed to grow, the larger the root system becomes and the more difficult they are to pull out. Gardeners understand this. When a weed first comes up in a garden, it is small and frail. It can be plucked out easily. However, if one neglects the garden for some time, pulling the weeds is a big job. The roots of the weeds have then become large and entrenched, and sometimes a large hole has to be dug in order to remove them. Healing is easier if you remove a bitter root as soon as it is planted.

Another thing happens if we neglect to keep up with our "weeding." If we allow the sins to pile up, eventually they become too obvious to ignore. People who have lived in the country know what a septic tank is. It is a big cement tank buried underground into which the wastewater from a house

Because forgiving is so important, we need to remove every obstacle that prevents us from accomplishing it, and we need to be diligent in accomplishing it.

runs. There the waste goes through a natural process of cleansing, but some types of waste stay in the tank and gradually fill it up. Periodically

¹¹ Note that this is not an exception to the fact that God protects us in ways we don't know. We may be protected from reaping from some of our sins while we are here on earth, but all our unrepented sins will be placed before us at the Great White Throne judgment. We will still be saved, though we will suffer loss (1 Corinthians 3:15). Exactly what "loss" means is not explained in the Bible, but God knows. Since He loves us, He wants to protect us from this "loss." That is why He is so diligent in getting us to repent of our sins during our lifetime here on earth. He takes the long, eternal view.

it needs to be pumped out, or it overflows and makes a smelly mess. Our hearts are a bit like septic tanks. If we don't keep our own pumped out, it eventually fills up with junk, overflows and makes a mess. It is therefore important that we pump ours out every time some waste enters it. In other words, we need to forgive every time we judge so that our own "septic tank" (our heart) stays clean.

Who Do We Need To Forgive?

There are probably many people we need to forgive. Psychotherapy and Christian counseling have both tended to focus on relationships with our parents and our siblings. Without a doubt these relationships were impactful, and the roots of bitterness resulting from being wounded by them causes major problems for us.

However, the deepest hurts, the greatest emotional pain, and the most devastating fruit comes from judging God and judging ourselves. Yet it may seem strange and new to be praying and forgiving God and of ourselves.

How We See God

Our childhood experience with our parents (or to a lesser degree, other primary care givers) powerfully affects our adult relationship with God.

God ordained a very special position for our parents. We are spiritually connected to them, and their love and protection are essential for us. Because of this special place they have, they are our first and most foundational experiences with authority

In whatever ways they fail in their duties as parents (and all parents fail to some degree), we judge them. These judgments and expectations then taint our view of all authorities. Since God is the "ultimate parent," we see God as being like our parents.

If our parents were mean, or violent, or judgmental, we now expect God to be that way. We can know all the verses in the Bible that tell us God loves us and tenderly cares for us, and yet somehow we find ourselves being afraid of Him.

On the other hand, if parents are neglectful, we don't expect God to be interested in us. In some ways, when neglect is the problem, it is more difficult to recognize our parents' impact on our relationship with God than if parents had been mean or violent. This is my story. My problem is that I grew up having to fend for myself; and so when I confront a problem, I tend to just jump in and solve it myself. It doesn't

occur to me to look to Him; because at a subtle but profound level, I am not aware of His presence.

But He is present. He isn't like my parents. Since my misperception is based upon my Bitter Root Judgments, forgiving is the only way for me to get free to see God as He really is. For me, now whenever I recognize I have been unaware of His presence (and He has to help me to see this), I need to forgive my parents, and then also forgive God, because I have judged Him as being neglectful of me.

Believing that God is like our parents is a deep, pervasive, and very subtle root in all of us. Look for this pattern in your life.

For more detail on this, see the chapter, "How We See God" in Transformation of the Inner Man by John and Paula Sandford.

Importance Of Forgiving God

Somehow it seems weird to forgive God, because He did not do anything wrong! And perhaps it is scary to think that we may have blamed Him. But I believe that all of us have judged Him in some way.

It is important to recognize that for us to have judged another does not mean that person actually wronged us. What is important is that we perceive that he or she has wronged us. For instance, we may feel that an individual has rejected us, and we may have become angry and judged him. Then we may find out later that the person did not reject us at all. Even though he didn't actually wrong us, we still need to forgive him and be forgiven. Discovering that the person had not actually rejected us will not remove the bitter root that we planted. The discovery that he did not actually reject us may make it easier to forgive, but it does not remove the bitter root that was planted when we judged him. Though we wrongly perceived the rejection, a legal transaction still occurred in the spiritual realm, and that sin needs to be paid for by Jesus, or we will surely experience the bad fruit from the bitter root.

This is the way it is with God. He did not do anything wrong, but when we judged Him, we thought He had. For instance, if as a child we were abused, it is very likely that when the abuse was happening we judged God for not protecting us. Though we may not be consciously aware of this judgment, we will reap from this bitter root until we forgive Him.

Importance Of Forgiving Yourself

It may also seem strange to recognize that you have judged yourself. In addition, forgiving and asking for forgiveness for judging yourself may seem very unusual and unnatural. But Paul said that God is the only one who has a right to judge you. You do not have this right.¹² I will explore this issue in more detail in Chapter 9, "There Is Buried Treasure." Here I simply want to point out that your relationship with yourself is very important. You need to repair it where it is damaged, and you need to live with yourself in a new and loving way.

I have counseled people who have been working on their Inner Healing for years and who have forgiven every person imaginable, and yet they were still suffering great emotional pain. I have found that the key for these people is that they had judged themselves and have not forgiven and been forgiven.

In fact, all the people I have ever counseled have judged themselves to some degree! I was a bit astounded when I first realized this. Self-judgment is often under-emphasized in Inner Healing, and my mentors did not teach about this.

Remember the example in the prior chapter where I cut my finger when I was cutting up carrots. When I would say to myself, "You dummy, why weren't you paying more attention to what you were doing?", that was a self-

First recognizing that we have judged ourselves, and then walking out the healing of it, is one of the biggest keys to Inner Healing.

judgment. I used to judge myself in that way very frequently. Many of us do this sort of thing to ourselves regularly. If you do this, you need to realize this self judging is very destructive.

When people say, "Ed, this is really weird, speaking to myself and asking myself to forgive me." To this statement I simply respond, "When you cut yourself instead of the carrot and say, 'You dummy', who are you talking to?" Inevitably they say, "To myself." You see, we all speak to ourselves regularly, but it is frequently harsh and judgmental talk. The

¹² **1 Corinthians 4:3-5**, *In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts; and then each one's praise will come from God.*

thing that feels weird about speaking to ourselves in forgiveness is not that we are talking to ourselves, but that we are saying nice things.¹³

Elements For Accomplishing Forgiveness

There are certain elements involved in walking through the process of forgiving when we have judged:

1. **Recognition**: First, we need to recognize that we have judged (sinned). Denial and fear can often interfere with our ability to see what we have done.
2. **Confession**: Then we need to confess that we have sinned.
3. **Repentance**: This means to turn away from the sin. We need to hate the sin and want to no longer repeat it.
4. **Forgiveness**: We need to make a decision to forgive, and then forgive from our heart.
5. **Accept forgiveness** from God. Sometimes another person needs to verbalize to us that God has forgiven us before we are able to accept this fact.
6. **Ask the Lord to fill** that place in our heart with His presence. We need Him to take up residence in that place that had previously contained bitterness, judgment, and blame.
7. **Ask the Lord to bless** the other person. If we find this difficult to do, then it is likely that forgiveness has not been fully accomplished.
8. **Restitution**: Sometimes we need to do something extra for the other person, to walk an extra mile. Our relationship with the Lord has already been restored through prayer, but in some situations we need to do something for the other person in order to restore our relationship with them. This is the purpose of restitution.

¹³ This conversation with myself restores the relationship I have with myself, but it doesn't stop the reaping from God's laws. So I also have to forgive and be forgiven by God

How To Pray

Forgiveness must come from the heart to be effectual:

So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses (Matthew 18:35).

It is always important that we forgive from our heart as the living Lord leads, rather than recite a rote prayer.

Jesus always looks on the heart, not the behavior, and we can't fool Him. Therefore it is always important that we pray as we feel led by the living Lord, and NOT simply recite a rote prayer, as though it were a magical formula.¹⁴

The Importance Of Words

Please be aware of the important position that words have in our prayers of forgiveness. For some reason, God set up the universe in such a way that words have power. *Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light (Genesis 1:3).* The words that I speak bring my thoughts into reality. Once they are spoken, it is as though a legal contract has been signed, or a legal event has happened, in the spiritual realm. The words can be "bad" and bring about difficulty (for example judging), or they can be "good" and bring about life (for example blessing someone). Though the Bible doesn't explain to us why words have power, it does make the fact abundantly clear, that they do have great power.¹⁵

¹⁴ See Endnote #5-4 for a sample prayer of forgiveness. Please use it only as a guideline and not a rote prayer.

¹⁵ See Endnote #5-5 for more scriptures on the power of words.

How To Forgive God And Yourself

Accomplishing forgiveness of God and of yourself is very similar to forgiving others who are close to us. In the case of close, important relationships, we not only want to stop the reaping from our Bitter Root Judgment, we also want to restore the relationship. If I have judged my wife, this attitude has probably affected my behavior towards her. Since she is a sensitive person, my new tainted behavior will hurt her. Then I not only need to forgive her to remove the bitter root, I also need to take responsibility for my behavior and ask her to forgive me.

As another example, imagine that your best friend completely forgets about your birthday. You are hurt by this, and you begin to withdraw from the relationship. Your friend can tell that you are angry, but doesn't know why. When you realize that you have judged him (or her), you need to pray as mentioned previously (See "Elements Involved In

In the case of close relationships, when you judge you have two things to do:

- 1. Resolve the problem in the spiritual realm.**
- 2. Restore the relationship with the other person.**

Accomplishing Forgiveness"). This takes care of the spiritual aspect of the problem, but now you need to restore your relationship with him. You need to go to your friend, confess that you have judged him, and have allowed your bitterness to affect how you have treated him. Then you ask him to forgive you for withdrawing, and your friendship is restored.

In a similar way, when you have judged God or yourself, you likewise need to resolve the problem in the spiritual realm as well as the problem in the relationship. After all, these are the two most important relationships you have, and judgments interfere with these intimate relationships. You need these two relationships to be loving, open, and intimate, or life will not go well.

For example, suppose you judge yourself when you cut yourself instead of the carrot, as in the prior example. When you realize you have done this, you confess this to the Lord, forgive yourself and are forgiven by God. Then you need to restore your relationship with yourself by speaking to yourself, saying something like, "Forgive me for judging you

and calling you a dummy." You say exactly the same things you would say to your close friend when he or she forgot your birthday.

Forgiving Is Miraculous

My Dog Story

I am a jogger, and I live on the side of a mountain. In the winter it is icy, and I can't run here; because I will fall and break something. Therefore I drive 4 miles to town. There is a street that is about 1 1/2 miles out and 1 1/2 miles back that is plowed and sanded and does not have much traffic. That is my running track in the winter.

One day a few years ago I was almost at the far end of the run when two mid-sized dogs ran out after me. I have learned that you don't run from dogs, so I turned on them and I shouted,

"Hey, you get back there."

They skidded to a stop. The owner was a woman who was standing on the sidewalk. She said,

"Hey, don't talk to my dogs like that."

I said, "Lady, you have to be kidding me. We are in town, there is a leash law here. Your dogs shouldn't be here in the street."

She called her dogs and went inside.

As I continued my run, I was very upset.

I thought, "This is the only convenient place I have to run, and I'm not going to let them spoil that. What will I do about it? I know what. I have a foot long steel bar in my garage. I'll carry that. Then when they come out, I'll take care of them."

Then I thought again. It wasn't really the dogs' fault, and I'd probably get in trouble if I hurt them. Then what can I do instead?

"I know what I'll do," I thought. "I'll carry my cell phone. Then when they come out after me, I'll grab one of them by the collar and call the dog warden. Then she'll get a ticket, and that should fix her."

I finished my run, drove home, showered and dressed, and went to my office. As I sat down, I was still chewing over this situation. As I grumbled over it, I got the distinct impression that the Lord was tapping me on the shoulder. I knew what He wanted: He wanted me to forgive the woman. I didn't want to forgive her, and argued with the Lord.

"But she was so thoughtless. She had no right to let her dogs loose, etc, etc, etc."

Eventually I realized I was going to lose the argument. I reluctantly agreed to forgive her, though I still didn't want to. I was fully convinced I was right, and she was wrong.

Initially as I prayed it was pretty mechanical and wooden. However, as I prayed, gradually I calmed down; and the forgiveness became more real. I forgave her, asked the Lord to forgive me for judging her. I asked Him to take out the bitter root I had just planted, to cleanse that place, and to fill it with His Holy Spirit.

As I prayed, I began to recognize that she had a permanent scowl on her face. It also occurred to me that a healthy person would have said something like,

"I'm sorry, sir. Are you alright? Did my dogs scare you?"

I realized that she was a wounded and unhappy person. I felt compassion for her, and I began to pray for her. I suspected that she might not know the Lord, and I began to pray for her salvation.

Suddenly it was as though I was struck by lightning. The change in my mindset was stark. I realized that I was now seeing her the way the Lord sees her. I wasn't praying for her salvation because it was the "Christian thing to do." I was praying for her because I saw her pain and neediness.

I realized that a miracle had occurred!

Before I prayed, I was a bit nuts. I was on the throne, she was wrong, and I was sure I was right. I was in the mind of the "flesh." (my God-wannabe). Bad fruit (my plans to make her pay) was coming from that bitter root.

**I realized that
a miracle had
occurred!**

After I prayed, I saw her neediness and wounding. I was now seeing her as Christ saw her. I now had the mind of Christ. Jesus was now in me where the bitter root had previously been planted, and that new good root was producing good fruit (my compassion for her). I wasn't trying to see her with eyes of compassion. I simply did.

When we forgive and Jesus forgives us, a miracle occurs. It is not something we can accomplish on our own. We can repress our anger, or try to be nice; but we can't change what is inside us. Only the blood of Jesus can accomplish that change. And He does it! He came and died and rose again to make this possible.

Entrusting God With Our Behavior

The truth is that good behavior (fruit) can only come from a good root inside, not from my striving. Unfortunately, it is not easy for us to entrust God with the job of changing our behavior. Let me explain.

We all have a tendency to distrust whatever we cannot control. Since we cannot control our inner life (that which is below our level of consciousness), we distrust whatever comes up from inside us. We believe that we need to be the watchman who monitors and controls our behavior. We also tend to be under the illusion that we can decide what we want to do, and then accomplish it. In fact, many of us have been misled by the church to believe that any bad behavior is a conscious "choice" we made.

Most of us have tried to live like this, and have discovered major areas of our lives where this has not worked. Most of us haven't known about another way to live that does work.

I have just been writing about the alternative. This new way involves recognizing that this persistent bad behavior comes from bad roots (roots of bitterness) in our "Honeycomb," and that good behavior comes from good roots. It requires recognition that only the blood of Jesus, and not our effort, can change us. Therefore, the only way to have enduring good behavior is to remove the bad roots by forgiving and being forgiven, and then to invite the Holy Spirit to come into those places (to become a good root inside us).

Unfortunately, you will likely find it to be very uncomfortable to abandon the old philosophy and live life in the new way. It is foreign to all of us, and requires a lot of trust. It is important for you to recognize that you will have to wrestle with this difficulty. We all do. But be assured that the blood of Jesus works.

This book is intended to give you detailed instructions as to how you can live in this new way, and thus be changed.

Sample Prayer of Forgiveness

If you would like a suggestion as to how to pray when you are forgiving, I have included a sample prayer in **Endnote #5-4**. Once you grasp the pattern, it is best that you begin to use your own words, simply following the Holy Spirit as He leads you to pray from your heart.

Summary

Forgiving (and being forgiven by God) is the key to accessing God's provision for taking away our sin. It is the only door to freedom. It is the only means available for stopping the bad fruit in our lives – for us to stop doing the things that we hate. God made this provision, and it is of central importance that we understand what forgiveness is and how to accomplish it so that we can then apply this God-ordained provision for healing. Jesus came to set us free:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18-19, KJV).