

Total Forgiveness 2 (Gen 45:1-15; Eph 4:30-32)



Forgiveness is a direct command of Jesus therefore true believers do not have a choice in this matter. Unforgiveness will cause us to walk under closed heaven outside true fellowship with God. (1 John 2:9, 11; C.f. Matt 6:14-15) Being 'imprisoned in bitterness' is like drinking poison and hoping it will kill the other person.

Forgiveness is not:

- Justifying the evil and minimizing what happened as 'not punishable'.
- Denying what happened. It is not denying our anger. 'Repressing' is like holding a basketball underwater. It will sooner or later explode on someone else and find someone else to blame.
- Pretending we are not hurt. We can be too proud to admit it.
- Full reconciliation or restoring relationship that of 'trust'. It takes two to reconcile, but forgiveness is one's inner condition. Forgiveness is given, but trust is earned.

A. Process of Forgiveness

1. We must **acknowledge the hurt and pain before God**. This is the first step.
2. **It starts in the will, not in feeling**. Just as love is a choice, forgiveness is a choice. It is based on our obedience to Jesus' words. *When you want to forgive the least is when you need to forgive the most.*
3. **We need to ask Jesus to help us to forgive. We supply the will and Jesus supplies the power.**
Who do we need to forgive? (a) people who wronged me and stop blaming them; (b) myself and my sins
4. **Refusal to take revenge** in any shape or form, either overtly or covertly. *'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay' says the Lord.* (Rom 12:19) We have relinquished our 'rights' to take vengeance into our own hands when we accepted God's total and unconditional forgiveness. It is God's exclusive right to vindicate us in His time and in His way.
5. **Refusal to engage in the mental fantasy** of torturing the perpetrator. It is not 'denial' or 'repression', but an active choice to tear up the record of the wrong against us. (c.f. Micah 7:19) *Our willingness to forgive doesn't depend on the perpetrator feeling sorry. Do we have a problem forgiving? We have a problem remembering how much we have been forgiven (Selwyn Hughes).*
6. Take one step further and **actively and verbally bless that perpetrator in the name of the Lord**.
 - Important rule 1 *'Don't tell someone you have forgiven them unless they ask for your forgiveness.'*
 - Important rule 2: *'Peace is better than punishment.'*
7. **It is a lifelong commitment to forgive. It is a process, not one event**. When Jacob died, Joseph's brothers panicked. They were afraid that Joseph would at long last get his revenge (Gen 50:15-21). What Joseph did all those years ago still held good. *'I forgave you then, and I forgive you now.'*

As Christians, we want to be in positions 6 and 7, not in positions 1 and 2. Again, forgiveness doesn't mean we must become best friends with the perpetrator the next day or giving them the power to abuse you again. It is about being free of resentment from within our hearts and setting them free into God's hand.

B. How do I know that I have truly forgiven others?

What does total forgiveness – **the God kind of forgiveness** - look like? How do I know I have taken the final step in forgiving? A quick acid test is the 'absence of bitterness.' How do I know I am free from bitterness? A splinter in my finger must be taken out first before bandaging the wound, otherwise it will fester in time. How do I know the splinter is out? Touch and rub the wound. Does it hurt? What is your response to your memory of the past?

In Gen 45:1-15 we have the account of Joseph revealing his identity to his brothers. It is in these verses that we find a biblical standard and frame of reference by which we can measure whether we have totally forgiven those who have wronged us.

1. **You have no desire to punish them** for what they have done. *'There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear because fear involves torment (punishment).'* (1 John 4:18) *But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.'* You are not afraid to see them get off the hook scot-free.

'kolasiv echei' translates to 'fear has or possesses punishment', i.e., the person living in fear is obsessed with the idea of punishment. There are four ways of interpreting.

- i. The person who lives in fear is already punished by this fear, truly living in torment.
 - ii. The person is in fear of being punished by God.
 - iii. The person in fear is always punishing himself.
 - iv. The person who lives in fear wants to punish others. We fear that justice isn't going to be carried out on those who have been unjust to us. So, we move in on God's territory and take it upon ourselves to punish others (Heb 10:30). But God has not given us a spirit of fear. (2 Tim 1:7) All such fear is oppressive in nature and God never oppresses us. He convicts us to set us free from sin. He doesn't want us to live under such fear.
2. **You have no desire to expose them** for what they have done to you. Joseph cried out, *'Make everyone leave my presence!'* (Gen 45:1) when he revealed his identity to his brothers. Until this moment Joseph spoke through his interpreter. The interpreter had no idea Joseph could speak the Hebrew language. Joseph got every court official out of there including the interpreter. Why? It was to remain strictly within the family. He did not want to be published in the *Egyptian Sunday Telegraph* or on the 'celebrity gossip website' as the family 'hero' and his older brothers as 'human garbage.' Joseph wanted his brothers to be royal guests in Egypt. What Joseph's brothers had done was going to be buried as a secret forever.

Why would we want to let the whole world know about somebody's sin? Because we want them punished. *'Love covers a multitude of sins.'* Joseph protected the ones he forgave. This is how God forgives us.

3. **You have no desire for them to be afraid of you** or feel intimidated by you. *Joseph's brothers were 'dismayed at his presence' (afraid) so they couldn't answer Joseph (Gen 45:3).* Joseph said, *'Please come near to me.'* (Gen 45:4) Joseph didn't want them to be afraid of him. He wanted to embrace them one by one. When we 'lack forgiveness' we want to make our enemies feel uneasy and squirm in our presence. Joseph could easily have his brothers fall on their faces in fear and trembling. But Joseph wanted them to be at ease in his presence. *'He kissed all his brothers and wept over them, and after that his brothers talked with him.'* (45:15) This is how Jesus also wants us to feel in God's holy presence.
4. **You want them to totally forgive themselves.** Joseph said, *'I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt (not denial or repression). But now, do not therefore, be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here (Joseph knew the source of their fear and addressed it); for God sent me before you to preserve life.'* (Gen 45:4-5) They already felt deeply *guilty* over what they did (Gen 42:21). Joseph didn't say, 'Well, I forgive you, but I hope you realise what you have done,' (lecturing them or making them wallow in guilt). Or say, 'I told you one day you would bow down to me.'

How did Joseph respond? *'Don't be grieved or angry with yourselves'* because behind all that has happened was the sovereign hand of God working for them all. Joseph made it easy for his brothers to 'forgive themselves' and to save their faces. *Saving face means preserving the person's dignity and self-esteem.* It may mean covering the person's error, so they don't get embarrassed.

5. **You have no desire to hurt their future or their children - you can truly wish them well.** Joseph provided for all his brothers during the years of famine and beyond. *'For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in, which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance... You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near to me, you and your children, your children's children, your flocks and your herds, and all that you have. There I will provide for you, lest you and your household, and all that you have come to poverty for there are still five years of famine.'* (Gen 45:6-7, 10-11)

What if your measure of blessing and anointing of the Spirit depends directly on your willingness to forgive totally? What would you choose to do?

6. **Total forgiveness sees God's sovereign hand in the midst of the pain and injury of your past.** Joseph's view of the past is NOT 'you sold me here in Egypt to suffer', but 'God sent me here to save lives. God did it. How do you think that made the brothers feel? Can you imagine the look on their faces? 'It was God who did it?' (45:8) The burden of guilt that haunted them for years must have rolled off their back!

The truth is that God's word (promise) tested Joseph until he was ready to step into God's call!

'Moreover, He called for a famine in the land; He destroyed all the provision of bread. He sent a man before them – Joseph who was sold as a slave. They hurt his feet with fetters, he was laid in irons. Until the time that his word came to pass, the word of the LORD tested him. The king sent and released him, the rulers of the people let him go free. He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his possessions, to bind his princes at his pleasure, and teach his elders wisdom.' (Ps 105:17-22)

'And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.' (Rom 8:28)

If we will let the word of God test us and do its intended work in us, our gracious God will come from behind and shape our past in such a way that only 'good' comes out of EVERY situation! Total forgiveness is anchored in God's sovereign hand intimately involved in our lives to bring out the best in every situation (Rom 8:28)

But the principle of Rom 8:28 is suspended and postponed as long as we are bitter toward God and other people, but is released into motion when we love God and continue in His purpose.

7. **Total forgiveness is demonstrated when we keep someone's sin hidden from the person who means the most to them.** What did the brothers fear the most? It was Jacob, their father finding out the truth. They would rather die than to face their father learn their abominable act and the cruel lie they had kept up all these years. That is why Joseph said to the brothers, *'Go back and you say to our father, Joseph is alive. God made him governor of Egypt and blessed him. That's all you need to tell him.*' (Gen 45:9-11) Those were the only instructions. Joseph could have said, 'Go back to your father and my father, and come clean and tell him everything you have done.' Joseph didn't exercise this option at his fingertips. The lack of forgiveness is measured by the degree we want their sin to be exposed to the people, which would damage them the most.

The way Joseph forgave is how God forgives us. What if at the judgment seat of God, we find that our sins are staring us in the face after being forgiven by the blood of Jesus – all the shameful things we have said and done broadcast to all in the open? Can you imagine what an unthinkable ordeal it would be for us? But when God forgives us, He forgives us totally, and 'God remembers our sins no more.' We do not possess the power to do this. But God does and that is what He promises us. *'For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.'* (Heb 8:12) *'As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.'* (Ps 103:12) This is the new covenant in Christ. *'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new.'* (2 Cor 5:17)

- This is 'God-kind of forgiveness.' This is how God forgave us of all our sins. What if God didn't forgive us this way? What kind of Christians could we possibly be? There is no other kind of forgiveness that is 'worth giving and receiving' but 'Godkind of forgiveness', i.e., 'total forgiveness'. Who wants to receive 'partial' or 'conditional' forgiveness from God? Or from each other? It is no forgiveness at all.
- *'And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.'* (Eph 4:32) Unforgiveness is directly related to grieving the Holy Spirit. *'Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you'* (Col 3:13) *'Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.'* (Rom 12:21)
- The one who totally forgives others from the heart militates his heart against self-righteousness and pride, for we are able to forgive we can see: (i) what we ourselves have been forgiven of, and (ii) what we are also capable of. *When we are repeatedly indignant over someone else's wickedness, there is a real possibility that either we are self-righteous, or we have no objectivity about our own capacity for wickedness.* It is healthy to see a little of myself in other people's failures. (C.f. Gal 6:1)