

Clean Slate
The Miracle of Forgiveness
Psalms 78, 25, 51, 103
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Introduction:

Hebrew and Greek are languages with much more specificity than is our English language. For example, four different Biblical words are translated by the single English word "*forgive*". In order to know the fullness of the term "*forgiveness*", let's take a look at these four different biblical words to get a better understanding of what it means both to stand before God forgiven and to have our sins forgotten.

**I. Forgiveness: *Our sins are* _____
(Psalm 78:38, Genesis 6:14)**

**II. Forgiveness: *Our sins are* _____
(Psalm 25:18, Lev. 14:7, Titus 3:5, Ezekiel 36:25-27)**

**III. Forgiveness: *Our sins are* _____
(Psalm 51:1, Luke 7:47, 42, Mt. 6:12)**

**IV. Forgiveness: *Our sins are* _____
(Psalm 103:3, Lev. 16:21)**

Conclusion/Application:

As we think about God forgiving us, ours is the opportunity and challenge to forgive others. "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us," Jesus taught us to pray.

It's not uncommon for Christians to have questions about forgiveness. Forgiveness does not come easy for most of us. Our natural instinct is to recoil in self-protection when we've been injured. We don't naturally overflow with mercy, grace and forgiveness -- towards others or towards ourselves -- when we've been wronged or when we mess up. Why not reflect on what the Bible says about forgiveness and discuss the implications.

The Bible offers insight and answers to these and many more common questions about forgiveness. Please take a look at the most common questions and find out what the Bible says about applying the forgiveness we've received from the Lord to others. (I'm indebted to Mary Fairchild for posing the following questions and responses about forgiveness.)

■ **Is forgiveness a conscious choice, or an emotional state?**

Forgiveness is a choice we make through a decision of our will, motivated by obedience to God and his command to forgive. The Bible instructs us to forgive as the Lord forgave us:

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Colossians 3:13 (NIV)

- **How do we forgive when we don't feel like it? How do we translate the decision to forgive into a change of heart?**

We forgive by faith, out of obedience. Since forgiveness goes against our nature, we must forgive by faith, whether we feel like it or not. We must trust God to do the work in us that needs to be done so that the forgiveness will be complete. God honors our commitment to obey Him and our desire to please him when we choose to forgive. He completes the work in his time. We must continue to forgive (our responsibility), by faith, until the work of forgiveness (the Lord's job), is done in our hearts. **Phil. 1:6**

- **How will we know if we have truly forgiven?**

Corrie Ten Boom, a Christian woman who survived a Nazi concentration camp during the Holocaust, said, "Forgiveness is to set a prisoner free, and to realize the prisoner was you." We will know the work of forgiveness is complete when we experience the freedom that comes as a result. We are the ones who suffer most when we choose not to forgive. When we do forgive, the Lord sets our hearts free from the anger, bitterness, resentment, and hurt that previously imprisoned us. Most times, however, forgiveness is a slow process.

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times." Matthew 18:21-22 (NIV)

This answer by Jesus makes it clear that forgiveness is not easy for us. It's not a one-time choice and then we automatically live in a state of forgiveness. Forgiveness may require a lifetime of forgiving, but it is important to the Lord. We must continue forgiving until the matter is settled in our heart.

- **What if the person we need to forgive is not a believer?**

Prayer is one of the best ways to break down the wall of un-forgiveness. When we begin to pray for the person who has wronged us, God begins to give us new eyes to see that person and a new heart to care for that person. As we pray we begin to see that person as God sees them, and we realize that person is precious to the Lord. We also see ourselves in a new light, just as guilty of sin and failure as the other person. We, too, are in need of forgiveness. If God did not withhold his forgiveness from us, why should we withhold our forgiveness from others?

- **Is it okay to feel anger and want justice for the person we need to forgive?**

This question presents another reason to pray for the person we need to forgive. We can pray for God to deal with the injustices, for God to judge the person's life, and then we can leave that prayer at the altar. We no longer have to carry the anger. Although it is normal for us to feel anger toward sin and injustice, it is not our job to judge the other person in their sin. Luke 6:37

- **Why must we forgive?**

The best reason to forgive is because Jesus commanded us to forgive. We learn from Scripture, if we don't forgive, neither will we be forgiven. Matthew 6:14-16

We also forgive so that our prayers will not be hindered. Mark 11:25

In summary and in closing, we forgive out of obedience to the Lord. It is a choice, a decision we make. However, as we do this "forgiving," we discover the command is in place for our own good, and we receive the reward of our forgiveness - freedom.