

SHOULD WE FORGIVE OTHERS CONDITIONALLY OR UNCONDITIONALLY?

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- A. Two texts that seem to contradict each other.
1. Luke 17:3-4 *If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him.*"
 2. Mark 11:25 *And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.*
 3. The Luke passage requires confrontation—you have to go to the sinner, show him his sin and wait for his response. If he repents and asks for forgiveness, then you must forgive.
 4. The Mark passage requires immediate, unilateral, unconditional forgiveness, from the heart, while you are praying. It excludes prior confrontation, confession and repentance as a necessary precondition for granting forgiveness.
- B. There are numerous passages in the Bible that require unconditional forgiveness.
1. 1 Peter 4:8 *Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.*
 2. 1 Cor. 13:4-8 *Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails*
 3. Prov. 10:12 *Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs.*
 4. Prov. 17:9 *He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.*
 5. Matt. 18:35 *In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."*
 6. Col. 3:12-14 *Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*
 7. Eph. 4:2,31-32 *Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. . . . Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*
- C. When God calls us to love and to forgive others in the manner that God has forgiven us, the focus is not on the conditions required for forgiveness but God's unmerited love and forgiveness.. We are called to imitate the free, generous, willing and eager nature of God's love and forgiveness.
- D. The way to reconcile Luke 17:3-4 with Mark 11:25 is to recognize that God does not (and neither should we) treat all sins the same way. Some sins by their nature require confrontation, others do not.
1. The Westminster Shorter Catechism reads, *Q83: Are all transgression of the law equally heinous? A83: Some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others.* John 19:11 *The one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.*
 2. The Bible also prescribes various levels of punishment for different crimes and warns that one sin is unforgivable, even though all sins, even the least sin, is deserving of eternal damnation.
- E. When should you confront a person with his sin and urge repentance? (Following Matt. 18:15-17)
1. When you observe an injustice to another. We may not overlook injustice to others, Proverbs 24:9.

2. When overlooking the offense would hurt the offender by failing to warn him regarding the future hurt he might do to others and the bad influence he may have on others, see James 5:19.
 3. When a sin brings shame and disgrace on the sinner and those he associates with (family, church, school, community) or when the sin damages the unity of the body of Christ.
 4. When an offense causes a broken relationship (e.g. marriage), repentance is essential to reconciliation.
 5. Withholding forgiveness is what the church does when it excommunicates a member. It should always be done in a spirit of humility, out of love, not in vindictiveness or anger, and always with prayer and a sincere desire for the sinner's repentance. Church discipline is imposed by a body of elders who were not themselves directly sinned against thus enabling them to judge objectively. It is nearly impossible for an individual who has been sinned against to be able to act with the same motives, goals, and objectivity and therefore an individual should never make the decision to withhold forgiveness unilaterally.
- F. When should you forgive by overlooking and bearing patiently with one another?
1. Whenever possibly, especially if the offense is minor or unintentional, e.g. Eccl. 7:21-22.
 2. When you are the only one offended or hurt. Even if the offense is public and flagrant, you may turn the other cheek. This includes persecution for the sake of righteousness. Acts 7:60 Stephen prayed, *Lord do not hold this sin against them.*
- G. If an offender shows no remorse for his sin, even after a confrontation, what should our attitude be?
1. We may never harbor a grudge, nurse self-pity or desire to get even. Eph. 4:32 and Col. 3:12-13 always apply. Rom. 12:19-21 *Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*
 2. We must be eager and willing to forgive, desiring the repentance of the sinner, not using his hardness of heart as an excuse for our anger, malice and spite.
 3. From the Heidelberger: *Q126: What is the fifth petition? A126: And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; that is, be pleased, for the sake of Christ's blood, not to impute to us miserable sinners our manifold transgressions, nor the evil which always cleaves to us; [Psa. 51:1-4; 143:2; 1 John 2:1-2] as we also find this witness of Thy grace in us, that it is our full purpose heartily to forgive our neighbor. [Matt. 6:14-15; Psa. 51:5-7; Eph. 1:7]*
 4. We must be willing to suffer wrong for the sake of righteousness, knowing God will make things right at the Last Judgment, 1 Peter 2:18-25, 1 Cor. 6:1-8 and 2 Thes. 1:6.
 5. Those who have been excommunicated from the church for their refusal to repent should be loved, prayed for, witnessed to, but not invited into our close fellowship as if they were still our brothers or sisters in Christ. 1 Cor. 5:9-11.
- H. Granting forgiveness yields much good fruit in the life of the forgiver.
1. According to John F. MacArthur, in his book, *Forgiveness*, showing forgiveness deflects pride, shows mercy, restores joy, affirms love, proves obedience, revitalizes fellowship, and thwarts Satan.
 2. Luke 6:37-38 *Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."*