

Forgiveness—Human vs. Divine

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I forgive you—I just don't want to have anything to do with you!

How would you feel if that's how God responded to your confession? You would likely protest: *Not fair! That's not forgiveness!*

You would be correct if you are talking about how God forgives. With His forgiveness, He wipes away our sin and restores our relationship with Him. “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2:13).

Yet, isn't that how we sometimes treat someone who sins against us? *Yes, I'll forgive you. But I don't want to have anything to do with you.*

Unbelievers view forgiveness differently than Christians. How can unbelievers forgive as the Lord forgave when they don't believe that they are forgiven by God?

Unfortunately, it's not only unbelievers that fail to forgive as God forgives. Christians sometimes reflect more of their sinful human nature than their saintly nature when forgiving.

Distinguishing biblical from human forgiveness

Misconceptions about biblical forgiveness often evolve from human practices. Note these differences:

- **Forgiveness is simply excusing.** Phrases such as “That's okay” or “No problem” minimize sin. To unbelievers, it may seem that forgiveness is just another way to excuse an offense. My sins are not excused. God's justice required blood. “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (Hebrews 9:22). But shedding my blood would be futile. God provided the perfect sacrifice. “The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).



● ***I'll punish you by withholding forgiveness.*** *You deserve my judgment and condemnation.* My sins need to be punished, and without Christ I am condemned! Jesus paid the full price for my sins so God doesn't punish me by withholding forgiveness. "But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

● ***I won't forgive you until you deserve it or earn it.*** Someone once told me she wouldn't forgive her husband until he proved his contrition with fruit of repentance. Thanks be to God He doesn't treat me that way! My forgiveness is *not* dependent upon my works to prove that remorse. "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

● ***I will never let you forget what you did!*** My past sins will not be brought up and used against me. God promises not to remember my sins and torture me with my past. "For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jeremiah 31:34).



What else distinguishes biblical forgiveness?

With God's forgiveness, I have been declared *not guilty*. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

My sins have been washed away. God no longer views me as sinful but as holy. "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Counselors tell clients that forgiving others brings inner peace. They advise forgiving for personal healing. Although forgiveness benefits the forgiver, the primary reason a Christian forgives is not for personal therapy. He forgives because he has benefited from Christ's forgiveness. Peace does not come from our own actions, but from Christ. "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

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The world may lead us to believe that to forgive is human. But that's inconsistent with Scripture. To forgive as God forgives is a divine gift, a privilege reserved for those forgiven through Christ.

Forgiven children of God are called to *forgive as the Lord forgives* (see Colossians 3:13; Ephesians 4:32). We have been given a divine gift. And this gift is not meant for us to withhold or dole out according to our personal whims.

God empowers us to perform divine gifts through the gift of His Son. “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, *that we might die to sin and live to righteousness*. By his wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2:24, emphasis added).

So, brothers and sisters, forgive—not as the world does, but as the Lord has forgiven you!



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For more information...

Ambassadors of Reconciliation provides a wide array of resources on forgiveness.

- *Confession & Forgiveness: Professing Faith as Ambassadors of Reconciliation* by Ted Kober (Concordia Publishing House, 2002). Explore how Christians can serve as ambassadors of reconciliation through daily confession and forgiveness. Learn from the Scriptures and contemporary stories how to recover and employ this blessing in your own life.
<https://www.aorhope.org/product-page/confession-forgiveness>
- *Proclaiming God’s Forgiveness*. This pamphlet features guidelines for confession and forgiveness within the family and with other Christians. Download a copy for FREE at <https://www.aorhope.org/product-page/proclaiming-god-s-forgiveness-form>
- *Forgiveness* Reproducible Bible Study. Forgiving as the Lord forgives us is so misunderstood in our society today, even among Christians. Review what Scripture teaches regarding biblical forgiveness.
<https://www.aorhope.org/product-page/forgiveness-reproducible-bible-study>
- Two Devotion booklets: *Forgiven to Forgive* and *A Reason for Hope*. Each features six weeks of daily devotions on forgiveness and reconciliation.
<https://www.aorhope.org/devotions>
- Find more resources at www.aorhope.org or call Ambassadors of Reconciliation at 406-698-6107.

