

# What about Consequences?

By Ted Kober  
September 18, 2020



Ambassadors  
of  
Reconciliation™

## Forgive and forget.

In a church where a treasurer embezzled from its funds, the congregation was polarized on how to respond. Some said, “We must not show any mercy. He deserves to go to jail and rot!” Others said, “Wait, aren’t we Christians? We’re supposed to forgive and forget!”

Neither of these viewpoints present a biblical perspective.



- “No mercy.” God himself is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love (Psalm 103:8). He requires us to do justice, to love kindness (mercy), and to walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8). Consequences may be appropriate, but that does not remove our responsibility to forgive as the Lord has forgiven us (Colossians 3:13; Ephesians 4:32).
- “Forgive and forget.” Forgiving does not mean forgetting consequences. Consequences may be required by justice (for example, to make restitution).

Forgiveness always relieves the most serious conflict of all—eternal separation from God.

Does forgiveness relieve consequences? Before you answer too quickly, let’s review what Scripture teaches.

Forgiveness always relieves the most serious conflict of all—eternal separation from God. “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

But can there be both forgiveness and earthy consequences? Consider examples from Scripture.

- Moses sinned against God by striking the rock at Meribah-kadesh rather than speaking to it as God commanded (Numbers 20:10-13). After leading the Israelites for 40 years, God disciplined Moses. He could look over into the Promised Land but was not allowed to cross over into it with his people (Deuteronomy 32:48-52). Nevertheless, Moses was forgiven and entered heaven, as was apparent when he appeared with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration.

- King David misused his God-given authority in his affair with Bathsheba and his execution of Uriah. The words of absolution were proclaimed by Nathan: “The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die.” Although forgiven and shown much mercy, David suffered severe earthly consequences. The sword never departed from his house. His son Absalom openly had relations with his wives. And the son born to Bathsheba died (2 Samuel 12:10-14).

The Bible teaches that forgiveness does not necessarily remove the earthly consequences. Nevertheless, our Lord often shows great mercy, withholding consequences. An example is given in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), in which the father showed great mercy to his repentant son.

When considering how to balance mercy with consequences, consider the purposes of consequences:

- **Consequences may be necessary to provide restitution.** God commanded that when someone committed a sin, he should confess and make full restitution plus a penalty for his wrong (Numbers 5:5-7). The fruit of Zacchaeus’ repentance was to pay back “fourfold” to anyone he defrauded (Luke 19:8).



- **Consequences may be a form of discipline for teaching the sinner.** The Lord disciplines those He loves just as a father reproves a son he loves (Proverbs 3:11-12). Discipline, which may be unpleasant, is a form of teaching which yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness (Hebrews 12:11).
- **Consequences provide others an example or warning.** If there are no consequences for a publicly known sin, it may give the impression that the sin is not that bad. Others may be encouraged to sin in similar ways. On the other hand, consequences for publicly known sins serve to discourage others from sinning (1 Corinthians 5:6-7). When Ananias was punished for his sins, “great fear came upon all who heard it” (Acts 5:5). People properly learned to fear God more than trusting in their own idols.
- **Consequences may protect a sinner from further temptation.** In the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:13), we pray that God would protect us from the temptations of the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh and keep us from evil. God sometimes uses consequences to help protect us from further temptation. For example, when a teenager wrecks the family car because he was careless, his driving privileges may be revoked until he can prove his trustworthiness. He is protected from wrecking another car and possibly losing his life.

Discipline, which may be unpleasant, is a form of teaching which yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness (Hebrews 12:11).



So, what about consequences? They may be necessary, even with forgiveness.

But thanks be to God that the greatest consequence of all is wiped away with Christ's blood. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

© 2021 by Ambassadors of Reconciliation. All rights reserved. Individuals are granted permission to copy this 3-page article for their purposes. Ministry leaders are granted permission to copy this 3-page article and distribute within their own congregation, school, or other ministry. This permission excludes copying and distributing for the purpose of reselling it or for any other purpose without the written permission of Ambassadors of Reconciliation.

## For more information...

Ambassadors of Reconciliation provides a wide array of resources on forgiveness, confession, and consequences.

- Two Bible studies include teaching on the relationship between forgiveness and consequences. *Go and Be Reconciled: What Does This Mean?* (<https://www.aorhope.org/product-page/go-and-be-reconciled-what-does-this-mean>) and *Conflict Resolution vs. Reconciliation* (<https://www.aorhope.org/product-page/conflict-resolution-vs-reconciliation>).
- *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>
- *Forgiveness* and *Confession* reproducible Bible Studies. Forgiving as the Lord forgives us is so misunderstood in our society today, even among Christians. Review what Scripture teaches regarding both confession (<https://www.aorhope.org/product-page/confession-reproducible-bible-study>) and 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](http://www.aorhope.org) or call Ambassadors of Reconciliation at 406-698-6107.

