

# The Law of Forgiveness

by Chuck Smith

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*Forgiveness is a matter of the heart, not just a number, and is necessary for our own forgiveness and healing.*

**Duration:** 29:11

**Scripture:** Mark 11:25

**Topics:** "Forgiveness", "Mercy"

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## Description

Chuck Smith emphasizes the critical nature of forgiveness in the Christian faith, drawing from Mark 11:25-26, where Jesus teaches that our forgiveness from God is contingent upon our willingness to forgive others. He illustrates that forgiveness is not merely a mathematical equation but a matter of the heart, urging believers to forgive as God forgives them. Smith recounts biblical examples, including Peter's question about the frequency of forgiveness and the parable of the unforgiving servant, to highlight the importance of a forgiving spirit. He encourages those struggling with unforgiveness to seek God's help in letting go of bitterness, as holding onto grudges can lead to emotional and spiritual harm. Ultimately, he calls for a transformation of heart to embrace forgiveness, reflecting God's mercy towards us.

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## Transcript

This morning we'd like to draw your attention to the 11th chapter of Mark's Gospel, and verses 25 and 26. Jesus is teaching his disciples concerning prayer, and he said, When you stand praying, forgive, if you have ought against any, that your Father also, which is in heaven, may forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father, which is in heaven, forgive your trespasses.

How important it is, how important is it that you forgive those that have ought against you, or those against whom you have ought? Well, how important is it to you that God will forgive you all of your trespasses? It's interesting that twice Jesus said that our forgiveness is pretty much predicated upon our willingness to forgive others. There in the text, But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father, which is in heaven, forgive you your trespasses. There in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus teaching again on the subject of prayer.

As he was giving to us what is commonly known as the Lord's Prayer, in that petition it was, Forgive us our debts, even as we forgive our debtors. When Jesus finished his lesson on prayer, he said, If you will not forgive men their trespasses against you, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses. So it is of utmost importance that we learn and practice the lesson of forgiveness, because our being forgiven depends on it.

Here in Mark chapter 11, Jesus again is talking about prayer, and he has just given some of the most important lessons on faith in prayer. He said, Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, that whosoever shall say unto this mountain, be removed and be cast into the sea, and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he says shall come to pass, he shall have whatever he says.

Therefore I say unto you, whatever things you desire when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you shall have them. And then he went right on to add, And when you stand praying, forgive, if you have ought against any. For if you do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.

You may ask, Chuck, do you really believe that that is true? Well, let me say this. When the Lord called me into the ministry, he did not call me to speculate on his word. He did not call me to change his word, but he called me to declare his word.

And I'm telling you, this is what Jesus said. I will not try to modify it or to diminish from it. Because Jesus did teach on forgiveness so much, one day Peter, thinking that he was catching on and getting the message, said to Jesus, How often should I forgive a brother who is guilty of the same offense? Seven times? Now I'm sure that in his mind, Peter was stretching a bit and thinking, I could maybe forgive a fellow seven times who is guilty of the same offense.

You see, the rabbis taught that you only had to forgive three times, that the fourth time you didn't have to forgive. But three times you should forgive, and then the fourth time you do something about it. In the book of Amos, over and over the Lord said for three transgressions, yea for four.

And he talked about the judgments that would come upon Tyre and upon Damascus and the other surrounding communities. But it was always for three transgressions, yea for four. And so because of three, yea for four, they said God only forgives three times, and if you do the fourth, then no forgiveness.

So God wouldn't ask us to do more than what he does himself. And thus after three times, you can go ahead and take your own vengeance on the situation. You're only required to forgive three times.

Well, Peter doubles that. Lord, I think I'm getting the message here. Seven times, three times twice, add one for sure, you know, for seven times, and the Lord said, no Peter, not seven times, but 70 times seven.

Oye yoye yoye, 490? You know, and I'm sure that Jesus is helping to Peter to understand that forgiveness is not a matter of mathematics. It's a matter of heart. It's having a forgiving heart that is so important.

It is interesting how terrible our sins look when someone else is committing them. I'm very merciful toward myself. When I do something wrong, well, I had a real, you know, I'm I'm so merciful and gracious towards me, and towards my flaws, and towards my faults.

But you do it, and I'm shocked. That's horrible. How could you ever think of doing something like that? I think of the story of David, who had committed adultery with the wife of one of his servicemen who was out fighting the battles.

When he discovered that she was pregnant, he tried through subterfuge to sort of cover over things, but it didn't work. And so he ordered that this soldier be sent into battle where he would be certain to be killed. And David received the message that he was killed in the battle.

And then, as a sort of a gesture of graciousness to ingratiate himself in the hearts of his subjects, he took this poor widow of a slain soldier, and married her, and ordered to watch over her. And to, you know, and everybody was saying, oh, isn't David wonderful? What a wonderful king, you know. He takes this fallen soldier's wife, and now is watching over, and going to take care of the child.

My, how wonderful David is. But God knew, and God spoke to the prophet Nathan. And Nathan was a friend of David, and he came in, and he said, David, I want to tell you about something that happened.

It's rather tragic. There's a man in the kingdom who was extremely wealthy. He had just a number of birds, and flocks, and he had all that he could possibly ever want.

Next to him, there lived a very poor man. All he had was one little ewe lamb. That ewe lamb was sort of like a family pet.

It ate at his table. It slept in his house. That's all he had.

Now, this wealthy neighbor of his had guests that were coming. So, he ordered his servants to, by force, take the one little ewe lamb from his neighbor, butcher it, and fed his guest. David was incensed.

He said, that man shall surely be put to death. Nathan said, David, you're the man. And David realized his sin in what he had done.

And David confessed, and he said, I have sinned against the Lord. And the prophet said, and God has forgiven your sin. Because of David's repentance and confession, there was forgiveness.

It's so important that we do forgive. The Bible promises, if we will confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. But having received forgiveness, it is now extremely important that if someone should sin against me, an offense, that if they come and they confess and they ask for forgiveness, it is important that I am forgiving.

Jesus gave the story to illustrate this point, the importance of forgiving the minor little infractions against me, when I consider the major things that God has forgiven me of doing. Sometimes I hear a person declare, I can never forgive them for what they did to me. But James tells us that he shall have judgment without mercy that has shown no mercy.

Jesus said, blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy. Some people find fault with me quite often because I am and seek to be very merciful. And they even accuse me of being merciful because maybe I'm guilty of the same thing.

I don't know. But I know I need mercy. And so that's why I seek to be merciful.

And I would rather err on the side of mercy than on the side of false judgment. Now, the criteria for forgiveness, of course, is repentance. I do not believe that God requires us to forgive unless there is repentance and confession.

Jesus taught, take heed to yourselves, if your brother trespasses against you, rebuke him. And if he repents, forgive. And if he trespasses against you seven times in a day and seven times in the day, he turns again to you saying, I repent, you shall forgive him.

It is important to note that even God does not forgive apart from repentance. And thus God does not require us to forgive apart from repentance. Now, Peter is thinking that he's getting the message.

He goes twice as far as the rabbis taught. And Jesus is basically saying, no, Peter, you haven't got the message yet. You are to forgive 70 times seven.

And then Jesus gave this story. Matthew 18, 23. The kingdom of heaven, he said, is like a certain king who was looking over the accounts of his servants.

And when he had begun to look at the books, one was brought to him which owed him five million dollars. But in as much as he could not pay, he commanded that he should be sold and his wife and his children and all that he had so a payment might be made. The servant, however, fell down and worshiped him and said, Lord, have patience with me and I will pay you.

Then the Lord of that servant was moved with compassion and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out and found one of his fellow servants which owed him 10 dollars. And he laid his hands on him.

He took him by the throat. He said, pay me what you owe me. His fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, have patience with me and I will pay you all.

But he would not. But he had him cast into the debtor's prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry.

They came and told their Lord all that was done. And then his Lord called him and said unto him, you wicked servant, I forgave you that great debt because you desire me to do so. Should you not have had compassion on your fellow servant, even as I had pity on you? And his Lord was angry and delivered him to the tormentors till he should pay all that was due unto him.

So likewise, Jesus said, shall my heavenly father do also unto you if you from your hearts do not forgive every one his brothers their trespasses? Think, Jesus said, how much God has forgiven you. Who are we to hold minor offenses against our brothers, sometimes so minor as they passed by and didn't even speak? Can you believe that? I'll never forgive them. Oh, help us, Lord.

Small little inconsequential things that we allow to build up within us and fester within until they poison our whole system. Jesus taught that if you want to be forgiven, you must be willing to forgive. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven you.

To the Colossians, he wrote, forbearing one another and forgiving one another. If any have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so do also you. A forgiving heart.

It's not mathematics. It's just a heart. So likewise, Jesus said, shall my heavenly father do also unto you if from your hearts you forgive not every one his brother their trespasses? Forgiveness is extremely important for your own mental well-being.

If you are holding a grudge against someone, chances are it's not bothering them at all. They're probably not even aware of what you're feeling. And yet, within there is this seething, this boiling, this anger, this, you know, just, it's eating you up inside.

And every time you think of it, it pours these horrible chemicals into your system, which are destroying you, doing great damage to you. Dr. Jones, who was in our church here for many years, moved back to Mississippi, was a psychiatrist, and he had a psychiatric hospital over in Brea. And the main thrust of his treatment was getting people to get rid of the bitterness and the unforgiveness that they had, because he said the majority of the mental patients were there because they would not let go of some experience or this business of being unforgiving and just letting it eat away at them.

And so, in his group sessions, the whole idea was for them to expose the things that they were angry about, the things that they were upset over, the things that really were churning inside. And then he would say, now just lay it out and forget it and forgive them. Just hold them up and say, I forgive you what you've done to me and how you've treated me.

And that was the treatment of getting them to be forgiving, that that was destroying them mentally and causing them really, it was driving them crazy, the anger and the bitterness and resentment that they had. We had a young girl named Susan who came to church here for a time. Her mother was Mrs. LaBianca, who was killed by Tex Watson and a part of that Charlie Manson gang, who went on that murdering rampage here in Southern California.

And the LaBianca home where they went in and brutally murdered Mr. and Mrs. LaBianca, Mrs. LaBianca was her mother. She was so angered and so bitter over her mother being killed in such a fashion that it was actually destroying her. She was almost dead physically.

It had gone that far. She read where Charles Tex Watson had become a Christian. And so she wanted to know if it was really true, if he was really a Christian.

And so she began to correspond with him. And she made arrangements to go up and to visit him there in the prison near San Luis Obispo. And so the day a visitation came, she went in and they sat and talked for a couple of hours.

Her idea was to really determine whether or not he was truly born again or just putting on a facade. And when she became convinced that he was truly born again, she said, I want to tell you who I am. My mother was Mrs. LaBianca, who you killed.

Tex Watson told me that when she said that, he said, I was floored. I didn't know what to say. He said, I almost fainted.

But she went on to say, I want you to know, because you're a Christian now, I forgive you what you did. He said a great weight was lifted off of him. But she told me that from that day, she was healed.

She began to get physically stronger. It was something that helped her to be able to forgive. She said, it saved my life.

I wouldn't be here today had I not forgiven him. It was killing me. But an unforgiving spirit can do that.

It can kill you. The emotions and all that you feel, the bitterness, the anger, it can destroy you. It is of utmost importance that we learn to forgive.

Now, I'm fully aware that there are things that have happened in your life deep cuts caused by others that cause you to believe and to think, I just can never forgive them. And I know that from a human standpoint,

that's correct. There's no way humanly that you can forgive the things that have been done against you.

But there's an old adage, to err is human, to forgive is divine. And I know that what you can't do, God can do for you. And so in thinking of that, that is causing you such inner turmoil, that situation or the things that they have done, I ask you the question, do you think that God will forgive them if they repent and confess their sin? And you'd have to admit, well, yes, God would forgive them.

Well, if God will forgive them, then he can help you to forgive them. And so I would suggest that in that kind of a situation where you feel I can never forgive, that you say, God, take this out of my heart. Don't let it destroy me.

Give me, Lord, that forgiving spirit like you have. So that should the opportunity arise and they confess and ask for forgiveness, I can truly say, I forgive you. And you can be released from that bondage that is destroying you.

My prayer to God is help me, Lord, to do what in my flesh I cannot do. Give to me, Lord, a forgiving heart. Father, that is our prayer today.

And I pray that you'll release many people today from those destructive practices of holding enmity, bitterness, anger, malice against things that have been done to them by others. And Lord, help them this day to be freed from those destructive forces and help them, Lord, to be able to forgive. Lord, we think of how much you've forgiven us, of all of the wrongs and all of the sins that we've ever committed.

And yet, Lord, when we confessed and when we repented, you forgave. Help us, Lord, that we shall do the same through the help of your spirit and the power of your spirit. May we, Lord, become loving and forgiving.

In Jesus' name, amen. Let's stand. God wants to set some of you free today from that which is holding you in its power and in its grip, that you might go from here today with a spirit of forgiveness, willing to forgive, letting go, just saying, okay, God, you take it.

I'm going to let it go. And just turning it over to the Lord and allowing him to work. Because as long as you hold on to it, know that it is hurting and harming you.

Let it go. The pastors are down here at the front to help you, to pray for you, and to pray with you. That you might experience God's deliverance and God's help today.

That you might go forth today free from that crushing, destroying spirit that is eating you alive and be free. In Jesus' name. The Lord bless thee and keep thee.

The Lord make his face to shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee and be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace.

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