

# The Art of Forgiveness

by Richard Siple

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*The art of forgiveness is a decision that requires us to bear the hurt and let our brother or sister go free, just as God has forgiven us through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 43:25, Matthew 18:15, Romans 5:6, 1 Corinthians 15:3, Ephesians 4:32

**Topics:** "Forgiveness", "Reconciliation"

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## Description

Dick Siple preaches about the importance of forgiveness, emphasizing the difference between a defeated life and a victorious life, and the need to forgive others as God forgives us. He shares personal illustrations of struggles with forgiveness and highlights the three major goals of God's forgiveness and ours: reconciliation, satisfaction, and inner peace. Siple stresses the significance of seeking reconciliation, bearing the hurt done to us, and choosing not to remember the wrongs, just as God forgives us.

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## Transcript

There is a difference between a defeated life & a victorious life, whether I accept it willingly or unwillingly.

LOVE: HUMAN & DIVINE--There is a difference between human love & divine love, & you can't make human love into divine love--it won't work.

Eph. 4:32, "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." I am to forgive in the same manner as God forgives me.

Illus: There was a time that whenever I thought of meeting a certain person the butterflies would begin to turn over in the pit of my stomach, I felt my fist begin to clench, my teeth would come together, & my heart would start to pound. And then I would almost feel my fist smashing into the face of this person, & hopefully the crunch of flesh & bone when it hit. This was even after I became a Christian, & was pastoring--trying to lead other people in the things of God--because there were some areas in my life where I hadn't learned what God wanted to teach me about forgiveness.

THE PRACTICE OF FORGIVENESS IS SO IMPORTANT THAT WITHOUT IT NOT ONE HUMAN BEING ON EARTH COULD EVER BE SAVED.

GOD'S FORGIVENESS & MINE HAVE 3 MAJOR GOALS:

When God forgives me, or when I forgive someone else, there are 3 things that I should seek to accomplish:

- a. RECONCILIATION--whether it's God forgiving me or it's me forgiving my brother.
- b. SATISFACTION--the score must be even, the debt must be paid. Justice must be done.
- c. INNER PEACE--within the heart that comes from learning how to forgive.

1. RECONCILIATION: In 1829 George Wilson was sentenced to hang for mail robbery & murder. President Andrew Jackson pardoned him, but George Wilson refused the pardon, & contended that if he refused the pardon he must be hanged. The U.S. Supreme Court was called upon to make a decision & Chief Justice John Marshall read this decision: "A pardon is a piece of paper, the value of which depends upon its acceptance by the person implicated. It is hardly to be supposed that one under sentence of death would refuse to accept the pardon. But if it is refused, it is no pardon. George Wilson must be hanged--" & he was.

When God reaches out to forgive me, God is seeking reconciliation. He loves me, I am at enmity with Him, & he wants to bring me back into fellowship & make me one with Him again, like it was in the beginning of man.

Many of us do not realize that the Word of God says to forgive one another EVEN AS GOD FOR CHRIST'S SAKE HATH FORGIVEN YOU. If the goal of our forgiveness is not reconciliation, then we have not even begun the first step towards forgiveness.

When I seek to be reconciled to a brother he may refuse, but God on His part offers full forgiveness. Some say they have forgiven but they don't want to be around him. A wife may say she has forgiven her husband, but she is not ready to go back to him--are you saying that you are not willing to be reconciled?

Mt. 18:15, Jesus taught that the first step in forgiveness was to seek reconciliation as our number one goal. If a brother sins against you, go first to your brother, & if he will hear you then you have gained thy brother. Do we really want to gain our brother or do we just want our conscience relieved? One of the great blessings in revival is to watch brothers & sisters reconciled--husbands & wives, pastor & people, board members, church members loving each other & having fellowship with each other, working together for the Kingdom of God.

Someone might say, "I can't bring myself to do that because it might hurt him." We are hurting him far more by refusing to be reconciled than if we went & told him his faults. Confrontation is part of reconciliation. (Good book: Caring Enough to Confront). Do you care enough, love your brother enough to go to him & say, "There is something between us, I have to discuss it with you; let's talk about it for Jesus' sake. Too many people are wanting to let "sleeping dogs lie, don't rock the boat," or they think that it will stir up too much unpleasantness & would rather leave things as they are.

(Art of Forgiveness, continued)

Mt. 5:16-19, And if he will not hear you, take 2 or 3 brethren with you, & in Jesus' name to loosen, to deliver, to be reconciled.

Illus: A little boy was commanded not to play near the pond, but he did. He fell in & got all wet. By the time he got home he realized his clothes were still wet & would be discovered what he had done. He saw his slate & chalk & wrote on it: "Dear Mother, I am sorry I have been bad. If you forgive me, please rub it out." Then he opened the door as quietly as possible, shoved the slate across the kitchen floor, shut the door & went around behind the woodshed. Then he came back, saw the slate on the back porch, crept up to look at the slate & it was washed completely clean. God wants to remove the things that are between His people. He can never bless & use until He removes those things.

-God brought me to the place that I realized my unforgiving spirit, & went to that person & confronted him, asked his forgiveness, & today I have a deep love & respect for him--we are totally 100% reconciled.

-If you have ever been asked, as a pastor, to leave a church? It is very difficult to forgive. But God dealt with my heart until He showed me that I was just as much at fault as they were & that I had as much to be forgiven as they did, & I owed them all kinds of apologies, & I needed to get back to that board & ask their forgiveness. I will never forget the day when I wrote the letter & sent it to the pastor then of that church & asked if he would please read that letter to his official board & to include every one who was on that board when I was there. And we were reconciled. They later had a reunion & I was asked to be one of the speakers! And a couple years ago I was asked to come back to that church for revival meetings. A few years later I received a letter from the District Superintendent who said that the board of that church had approached him to ask me if I would consider coming back there as pastor. We have so much to learn about forgiveness! But some may say that the problems are so terrible & the hurts are so deep & everybody is so angry & so many ugly things have been said that nothing could straighten it out. Some broken pride, & Calvary's cross, & the power of the Holy Spirit can straighten things out.

2. SATISFACTION: Mt. 18:21, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, & I forgive him? till 7 times?"

Parable, Mt. 18:23-35--Servant had a tremendous debt, impossible to repay, & asked for patience to repay it. That's like me saying to God, "If you will be patient, I'll be so good that I'll wipe out all the bad I've done." The reason I came to Jesus Christ & received Him as my Savior was because I am such a sinner, & there is no hope that I could pay the debt. Verse 27 says that the lord of that "servant loosed him, & forgave him the debt." We read that & take it very lightly, but Jesus was talking about Himself & about you & me in the first half of that parable. There

is no way that I can repay the debt of sin so Jesus is going to loose you & freely forgive you, but notice that the Lord doesn't forgive us by ignoring the debt. The Lord forgives us by paying the debt in full. Is that right? Is that good theology, biblical doctrine?

1 Cor 15:3, "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures..."

Rom. 5:6, "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly."

Rom. 5:7-8, "For a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

The only reason that God can forgive me of the terrible debt of sin of all the past & what I will do in the future--a lifetime of sin--is not because God overlooks sin, but He is a God of justice as well as love. But it is because God, in Christ, accepted the loss in my place & paid the debt for me & the score is even. My sins are not only against men but against God. David said, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, & done

this evil in thy sight..." My sins are against God, God has been hurt, God has been damaged, God has taken a loss. And what He has said is,"

I will accept the hurt that you have done to Me, I will accept the loss Myself. I will take all your debt upon Myself & I will bear it away on Calvary's cross, I will die in your place, I will suffer in your place, I will pay the full debt for you Myself so that I am not overlooking your wrong, but I am evening the score completely so that the debt is totally paid & you are fully forgiven & completely free from your sins." That's the Gospel!

(NOTE: The beginning of SIDE 2 of this cassette tape is on page 2, indicated above by the bold words, The Lord forgives us by paying the debt in full.)

(Art of Forgiveness, continued)

But have you ever thought that God says, "Be ye kind..., tenderhearted, forgiving one another, **EVEN AS GOD FOR CHRIST'S SAKE HATH FORGIVEN YOU**"?

HOW DO I FORGIVE? The same way God forgives! I accept the hurt which has been done to me--(not seething inside saying, he ought to pay, he ought to pay, he ought not to get away with that. O God, bring him to terms). It's funny how we pray for people--"O God, You know how this man has wronged Your people... Bring him to terms, bring him down" (that's pronouncing a biblical curse on him). **WHEN I HAVE BEEN WRONGED THE ONLY WAY THAT I CAN FORGIVE IS TO FACE UP TO IT & ACCEPT THE HURT THAT'S BEEN DONE TO ME & TO BEAR IT FOR HIM, VICARIOUSLY. I HAVE ALREADY BEEN HURT, I HAVE ALREADY PAID THE FULL PRICE. NOW ACCEPT IT!** Am I going to accept it willingly or unwillingly? Accept it, accept the hurt, bear it in his place & say, "O God, I bear that for him, I accept it, I pay the price, he's free, he doesn't have to pay." But you say, it isn't fair. Well, it's fair if you pay for it. If you bear it for him the score is even, the debt is paid.

Let's notice the last half of that parable, vs. 28-30, "But the same servant went out, & found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: & he laid hands on him & took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, & besought him saying, Have patience with me, & I will pay thee all (he tried to be reconciled). And he would not: but went & cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt." The Lord is saying, That master bore the loss in the place of his servant & evened the score & let him go free. And the servant should have turned around & bore the loss in the place of his fellowservant, the same as his master did; he should have accepted the hurt & the pain & the loss & bore it for him & paid the debt, suffered the loss & let his fellowservant go free. But he wasn't enough like his master. Oh, brothers & sisters, we're not enough like our Master, are we?

A pagan man said to a missionary in India, "The trouble with you Christians is that you're not enough like your book." We preach forgiveness through Jesus Christ, but when it comes to us forgiving it's a different matter. We tell others that Christ has paid the debt in full & they're free--but when it comes to our forgiving our husband or wife, our child, our pastor, our board member, we want them to pay in full instead of us accepting it & bearing it for them.

"So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, (& I have been made very sorry for seeing what some of my fellowservants have done) & came & told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?" (vs. 31-33). **THERE'S THE PRINCIPLES: THE ONLY WAY SATISFACTION CAN BE**

DONE IS FOR US TO BEAR THE HURT & LET OUR BROTHER GO FREE.

When Alexander was Czar of Russia, he use to camp with his army out in the open field right on the battlefields. One night after everything was quiet & dark Alexander was walking across the encampment among the tents as he often did, & he saw a light in one of the officer's tents. It was very late & he was wondering why there was a light burning in that tent. He very quietly went up to the tent, lifted the flap, & he noticed the young officer sitting at a table where the candle was burning, & he had his head down on his arms & appeared to be asleep. Alexander stole quietly into the tent, & as he got up to the table he saw that the man had his face down on the table & in his hand he had his service revolver, loaded & cocked. He was sound asleep with his face down on the table, & with the light of the candle Alexander could see a piece of paper with some things written on it. And as he looked closer he noticed a bottle of ink & one of those feathered pens they use to use, & there was a list of debts. When he looked at the face he noticed that he was the son of one of his family's friends in the nobility of Russia. Down at the bottom where he added the sum of his debts, some of which were gambling debts, he noticed this question: "WHO CAN PAY SO MUCH?" Then the Czar suddenly saw what was about to happen, that this young man was of a noble family in a situation where he could no way pay the debt, & rather than disgrace his family he was about to take his own life. He picked up the pen, & under the question, Who can pay so much, Alexander just wrote one word: "Alexander." Then he laid it down & stole quietly out of the tent. The young man awakened, picked up the revolver, put it to his temple & thought he would read his paper one more time, & he read down the list becoming more & more despairing, came to the end where he had written, WHO CAN PAY SO MUCH? And suddenly he saw there was something different than his handwriting. There was a word that he didn't put, & instantly he recognized it as the signature of the Czar: ALEXANDER. With a glad cry he leaped up from the table & said, "I am saved, I am saved." The next morning the servant delivered a bag

(Art of Forgiveness, continued)

of gold to his tent to pay the debt. All through eternity I am going to rejoice that Jesus Christ paid my debt! Who could pay so much? Jesus Christ--He is the only one who could pay.

But what about your fellowservant, your brother or sister? "O," you say, "they're going to pay." No, you will pay. Mt. 18:34-35, "And his lord was wroth, & delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses." That's from your will, not your emotions. There are thousands & thousands of Christians today who are being tormented with bitterness, with an unforgiving spirit. Are they hurting the person they will not forgive? Maybe, maybe not. But the one who is really being hurt is the one with the unforgiving spirit. He is being tormented & my brother & sister, I tell you today, that a Christian will be tormented in his inner spirit until he forgives. There is no other solution.

3. INNER PEACE: How does God forgive?

Isa. 43:25, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake..." God not only forgives us because we need to be forgiven, but God forgives us for His own sake.

My wife told me one day that God had shown her that forgiveness is something good I do for myself. God says, I will forgive you for my own sake. Even God cannot bear to have an unforgiven spirit. And how does He do it?--"And will not remember thy sins." I have heard all my life that God forgets our sins, & that would bother me because I knew that I was suppose to forgive like God did, but I couldn't forget. And many

Christians have said to me, "But I have forgiven, but I can't forget it." And then they went to God & they prayed & they prayed & said, "O God, take it out of my heart & my mind; help me to forget it." And the more they prayed about it the more they remembered it. So you know what God would have to do if He really made you forget it? He would have to perform some kind of surgery on your brain. Usually the things we need to forget are things we need to forgive. Well, doesn't God forget our sins? I don't know if He does or not. But it says, He won't remember. But that's different. God chooses not to remember our sins. That's quite different than forgetting. God chooses not to bring it to mind, not to think about it or not to talk about it. And if any voice talks about your sin, once you have taken them to God, it isn't the voice of God. Because God chooses not to remember! O brother & sister, I wish we could learn that!

A little girl had been good for a whole week. She asked a favor of her auntie & her auntie said, "You were bad last week & you cannot have it." And the little girl said, "Auntie, you're not one bit like God; when He forgives He doesn't keep throwing it up afterwards." What about you?

You know how it is--husband & wife have a little quarrel...& then they ask each other to forgive, & making up is such sweet sorrow & so much fun, & they kiss & make up. Then they say, I forgive you, & everything is fine, but then about 2 weeks later something else happens. Then one of them says, "Yes, and I remember what you did 2 weeks ago, or 2 months ago, or 2 years ago, or 20 years ago." I have counselled many couples & I am amazed at the memory of married people. They can't even remember to get the bananas at the grocery store but they can remember clear back to the wedding & before. God says, when I forgive you I make a decision of the will not to remember it any more, ever. You can make that decision of the will.

Forgiveness is not an emotional thing that happens to you. There isn't any sense you getting down on your knees & saying, "O God, help me to forgive." Forgiveness is a decision that I make. I choose to forgive just like God chooses to forgive. I choose to seek reconciliation. I choose to bear the hurt that was done to me & to let my brother go free. I choose by God's grace & by the help & strength of the Holy Spirit not to think or talk about their wrong ever again. But you say, I've tried to make those kind of decisions but it all just comes up into my mind again. Yes, but when it comes up in your mind again & something triggers it & you start to think about it, you can stop right there & say, "In Jesus' name I forgave that person & I refuse to think about the wrong they did anymore. Praise the Lord, they're forgiven." And you can turn your mind to something else. And I know how some people just drive themselves straight into depression because they say they've forgiven but then something triggers what has been done to them & it goes round & round & round in their mind & they think about it & turn it over & look at all sides of it & imagine all kinds of things about it & it gets deeper & stronger in their minds all the time. Or, somebody comes along & says to them, "We feel so sorry for you, brother, by the way you were treated by brother so-&-so..." And you didn't know anybody else saw it your way. And how nice it is to just talk about it & have their sympathy & weep together & say, God love him. But I've forgiven him.

(Art of Forgiveness, continued)

No, no! If you had forgiven him, as soon as that person brought that up to you, you would have said, "No brother, thank you, I appreciate your kindness but I don't want to talk about that because I have forgiven him. And I refuse to think or talk about it any more--he is forgiven for Jesus' sake." And until you do that you haven't forgiven. Some people don't want to think about forgiving because they're enjoying thinking about the hurt too much. They have too much fun with their pity parties. There's kind of a martyrdom that enters into it, as we turn over the wrongs that have been done to us & we really would hate to give up all

the hours of that sickly sweet pleasure we have thinking about the wrongs done to us. We would hate to give all that up by really forgiving, & choosing never to think or talk about it again. And nothing short of that is not forgiveness.

A young Greenlander was standing up in a missionary meeting testifying how he loved Jesus. And the missionary knew something about his background & he said, "My dear Christian brother, "What about your father's murderer? Have you forgiven him?" And the young Greenlander sat down & his heart was heavy & he knew he had not. And he went home to weep & to seek the face of God & made up his mind to forgive. It's the choice of the will as it always is. And so he sent for his father's murderer, who was well known to all in that area, but there was little government & no justice. And he sent for his father's murderer & had him in his home & told him that he knew that he had killed his father, that for Jesus' sake he freely forgave him & had him in his home for a meal & said it to him, & forgave him & treated him with kindness & sent him away. And not long after he received a note from his father's murderer, saying, he appreciated his kindness & would he please come to his home for a meal that he might return it. And in the innocence of his heart he went across the open water, way to this man's home & drew his boat upon the shore, went in & talked with him & had a meal with him. While he was in there this man had plotted to do away with him like he had done with his father, so he had a friend come & make a tear in the bottom of his boat which was made of skin. When the young man went out, his father's murderer was watching through the curtains of the window to see what would happen. When he got to the boat somehow the Spirit of God checked him & he looked & found the tear & realized what had been done. Slowly he got out some of his tools & repaired the hole in his boat. Then as he pushed the boat out into the water he looked up at the house & turned & shouted with all his might, "I freely forgive you, for our dear Lord has forgiven me." "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32).

How do I forgive like God? I seek to be reconciled. They may not do it but I seek it. I accept the hurt that has been done to me & I bear it for them & I let them go free. I can't tell you what that did to me the day that got across to me & I said, "Lord Jesus Christ, I accept every hurt that that person has done to me, &, Lord, right now I want to bear it for him. Forgive him; I bear it for him. I accept every hurt; let him go free. I don't want him to pay." Oh, what a relief. And then I choose not to remember. But you say, you've been talking about this wrong that was done to you. No, I haven't been talking about the wrongs that were done to me, & I can hardly even recall them, because God so delivered my heart, & so made myself & that person one again in deep love, that it's hard almost to remember the real wrongs. And that person said to me, "When I think about the quarrels we had I can't hardly remember any of the bad things, only the good things. Do you need to forgive? Or maybe I should ask first, do you need forgiveness? How many here need the forgiveness of God in Christ? Let me see your hands. Now, I won't ask you the next time for you to raise your hand--do you need to forgive? Let us bow in prayer.

Prayer: O Lord, self is so big & pride is so strong, & it all needs to go to Calvary, that we may forgive. Help us to do it. Do it in us & through us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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