



AN INTRODUCTION TO THE MATERIAL

by Canon Jim Holbeck

Healing ministries have many forms. It is important that they are conducted in ways that agree with biblical principles. Over the years I have often had to minister to people who had received inappropriate or even harmful counselling. As one woman who came to see me put it, “I have come here to be healed from my counselling.” As I listened to her it was obvious that her counsellor had been inappropriate in the questions that she asked. The counsellor had really failed to listen to what the woman had to say and had wanted to take the woman down a track she did not wish to go.

In some healing ministries trained counsellors seek to bring the insights from their counsellor training and background in an attempt to help improve the lives of those to whom they are ministering.

In other healing ministries some, who are not trained counsellors, will try to help people by sharing with them biblical insights they have come to know and appreciate. These insights they were able to apply successfully in their own lives. They know from experience that these truths work and they would long to see them work in the lives of other people.

In many healing ministries people with little or no formal counsellor training are encouraged to act as “prayer ministers”. Such people are taught to listen to the needs of others and then to pray for them appropriately. In such cases they are not introducing biblical or theological material in the listening process. However we need to recognise that when people begin to pray for another person their doctrines and their theology are expressed in the words of the prayers that they pray. So even in such so-called listening ministries the people ministering are giving doctrinal input into the minds of those for whom they are praying, when they begin to pray for them.

What is often not understood is that when we ask people to tell us more about their background to enable us to understand their situation more clearly, the questions we ask may be inappropriate and unhelpful. For example a question such as “Tell me about your relationship with your father” is a world apart from asking “Do you have any memories of your father molesting you or acting in inappropriate ways towards you?”

The first question gives the person freedom to express what they feel free to express. It is placing no value judgements on any person. The second question is urging people to dig up memories and introduces a questioning about the father’s past behaviour. There may have been nothing untoward in the relationship between the father and the person we are seeking to help, but the question, by its very nature, raises the possibility that something may have happened.

So it is extremely important that those who minister have a good understanding of biblical principles. They need to speak, act or pray in accordance with those biblical principles. To speak, act or pray contrary to those principles will not bring help to the person being prayed for. Rather it may bring harm.

What I am attempting to do in the material that follows is to give solid biblical teaching regarding many of the issues that arise in healing ministries. Jesus said that it is the truth that sets us free. So in any form of healing ministry we need to know the truth of God's Word and be able to share those biblical insights appropriately, in what we say and in how we pray, with the people to whom we minister.

TOPIC NO.1. THE ROLE OF FORGIVENESS IN HEALING

In this topic will be looking at the freedom that comes from forgiveness. This includes God's forgiveness of us and also our forgiveness of other people. We will do that by looking at a number of questions that are often raised in healing ministries regarding forgiveness. The following are some of the questions.

Question 1. "Why Is Forgiveness Necessary?"

Question 2. "What Is Forgiveness And How Do People Experience It For Themselves And Learn To Forgive Others?"

Question 3. "How Forgiven Are We? Does God Still Hold Things Against Us As Believers?"

Question 4. "Why Should We Forgive? What Motivation Should We Have?"

Question 5. "What Is The Freedom That Comes From Forgiving!"

Question 6. "What Can I Do If I Ask The Person I Hurt To Forgive Me But They Refuse To Do So? Is There No Closure?"

Question 7. "How Can I Forgive Myself?"

Question 8. "Some Folk Tell Me That I Need To Forgive God To Be More Healed. What Do You Think?"

Question 1. Why Is Forgiveness Necessary?

Brief synopsis:-

- Humans have to forgive other humans because we sin against each other.
- We sin by doing wrong things and by not doing right things in our relationship with others.
- All humans are guilty of sin against others and need to know the freedom that forgiveness of sins brings.
- Freedom from guilt comes as we experience forgiveness from God.

Forgiveness is necessary because we are imperfect humans

All of us have lived or still live in imperfect relationships of many types. These relationships have included family relationships in the past or the present, relationships at school, college and university and also our church relationships. Then there are the relationships in our work environment.

We would admit that some of those relationships were very enriching for us personally. Many of those people in those relationships brought something positive into our lives.

However we will also have to admit that the people in some of those relationships brought a lot of stress into our lives. Stress arising out of anything (especially relationships in the past or the present) can lead to "distress" or "dis-ease". Prolonged "dis-ease" can then lead to disease or to physical and emotional illness as well as spiritual damage.

Everyone needs healing of the damage coming from unhealthy relationships

No one is perfect. No relationship is or has ever been perfect. There have been in every relationship:-

i). Sins of commission. The things we or others did or “committed” which were harmful to others. Sometimes they were done deliberately in order to cause hurt and pain. These types of sins may have been in the form of words spoken which were meant to hurt emotionally. Or they may have been in the form of actions such as physical assault. Or even in the form of attitudes that were adopted where no words were spoken or physical hurt occurred, but the attitudes spoke strongly of rejection.

ii). Sins of omission. When we or they “omitted” or failed to do or say what was right and people were deprived of the support they should have received from us. No one has ever perfectly obeyed the second of the Great Commandments. *“You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”* Everyone has been guilty of putting themselves and their own interests above those of others.

Every person is guilty of both types of sin in varying degrees. Every person has been affected by those who sinned against them in this way.

Every human being needs to have the peace that comes from dealing with the guilt from relationships, whether that was the guilt from their sins of commission or the guilt from their sins of omission.

Guilt can't be ignored. Guilt can be powerful in our lives, even when we seek to cover it over or to ignore it. King David tried to hide his sin from God. It almost destroyed him physically, emotionally and spiritually. He expressed it this way in Psalm 32:3-4, *For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. 4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.* (See verse 5 for how he was healed)

The wonderful truth is this. Healing is accelerated as guilt is dealt with, and we become more open to God's healing love and power. We notice the wonderful healing for King David in Psalm 32:5, *“I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,” and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.”*

We'll look more closely at this later on, but we can see here the steps that led to his freedom from guilt, namely:-

- His decision to acknowledge his sin to God
- His decision to uncover His iniquity before the Lord
- His decision to confess his transgressions to the Lord

The same steps are necessary for us to take, in order to take h to Monica and I drove old of the freedom that comes through forgiveness.

<p>Question 2. What Is Forgiveness And How Do People Experience It For Themselves And Learn To Forgive Others?</p>

Brief Synopsis:-

- The three principles of forgiveness taught by Jesus
- The need to discern the difference between accusation by the devil and conviction by the Holy Spirit.
- Specific confession of sin brings freedom.

Jesus Taught Some Principles regarding forgiveness

In Matthew 18 Jesus was asked about the nature of forgiveness. He replied by using a parable in verses 21-35. It was the parable of the Unforgiving Servant. Note the three elements of forgiveness seen in verse 27, as a master showed forgiveness towards one of his servants. *“The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.”*

These three elements are all necessary for true forgiveness.

- i). A Decision To Show Mercy. *The servant's master took pity on him*
- ii). Cancelling The Debt Owed. *cancelled the debt*
- iii). Letting The Sinner Go Free. *and let him go.*

That is the pattern of God's forgiveness of us in Christ.

He chose to have mercy on us.

He acted in grace towards us in forgiving us in Jesus, and cancelling the debt we owed Him.

He freed us from the penalty of our sins (because Jesus bore them for us) so that we might be free.

This has to be the pattern of our forgiveness of others. Forgiveness is acting in grace towards others. This is seen especially in Ephesians 4:32, *“Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”* That is, we grace others with forgiveness in the same way God graced us with forgiveness.

In this verse “forgiving” and “forgive” are from “charizomai” (from charis = grace) meaning to “grace” or “forgive.” It means giving to someone something they could never earn or deserve. God did that for us when He forgave us in Christ. We need to do it for other people. It is not impossible to forgive. God commanded it of us because He knows that He can give us the grace to forgive.

How to experience the freedom of forgiveness for ourselves

We need to know and experience personally the depth of our forgiveness from God. We have an enemy in this world who is trying to bring us down and destroy us. He is called Satan. Satan is the accuser who tries to stop us experiencing the freedom of our forgiveness. (The Hebrew word “Satan” and the Greek words “diabolos” and “katagoros” all mean “accuser”.) We see this in the following verses,

Zec 3:1 “Then he showed me Joshua ... and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him”.

Rev 12:9-10, “And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil (diabolos) and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world.” 10, “for the accuser (katagoros) of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.”

We can see then that accusation is one of the tools of the enemy. He keeps attacking our minds with his accusations so that we do not have peace. What does it mean if a believer has a sense of guilt or feels condemned? This is one of the main areas where healing ministries can help people become free of guilt. All too often, believers carry unnecessary guilt. We have a great privilege in ministry to help people understand the difference between conviction by the Holy Spirit and condemnation by the devil. Only the former can bring release.)

In the following table we read from left to right in order to understand the difference.

The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin →	So that we might repent of our guilt →	Turn to God to ask for and receive God's forgiveness →	<u>The end result?</u> So that we might walk in freedom from guilt
The Devil accuses us and condemns us →	So that we might feel guilty →	So that we might turn away from God, feeling worthless and useless and dirty. →	<u>The end result?</u> So that we might be held captive in our guilt by Satan

Satan is the “accuser” who accuses us of the specific sins of the past and the present. (As do fellow humans as his willing or unwitting instruments.)

It means then that we have to know that all our sins have been confessed before the Lord and been forgiven by Him specifically. Only then can we walk in freedom from those sins. It means then that Satan (and others) have no grounds for accusing us. As forgiven people we can reject all the accusations against us in Jesus' name and live lives free from guilt.

Question 3. How Forgiven Are We? Does God Still Hold Things Against Us As Believers?

Brief Synopsis:-

- The Bible has many word pictures which enable us to understand the freedom of forgiveness.
- Old Testament pictures.
- New Testament pictures.
- The Ground of forgiveness. On what basis does God forgive?
- The importance of Jesus' death on the cross.

It is probably true to say that very few Christians actually walk in the totality of the freedom of their forgiveness. Many carry unnecessary guilt and may do so for years on end. So we need to know with the Bible says about how forgiven we are. We need to know and act on the good news of the completeness of our forgiveness from God.

God in his word in the Bible gives us a number of Word pictures to enable us to understand more fully how forgiven we are by Him. We will now look at some of those Word pictures.

Some Old Testament Passages Which Teach Us About Forgiveness

In Genesis 45 we see forgiveness in action. Joseph forgave his brothers for selling him into slavery. As he thought about his life, Joseph saw the big picture. His life had been saved from the murderous intentions of his brothers. Why? So that he might be used by God to save the lives of thousands of people including the members of his own family.

He recognised that his brothers had sinned against him. We see that in this very moving passage in Gen 45. *4 So Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me, please." And they came near. And he said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. 5 And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life."* Because he saw the big picture of God's purpose in all that had happened, Joseph chose to forgive them. He explained it in verses 7 and 8, *And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God.* It is important to note that Joseph was not in denial about his brothers' guilt. He saw them as guilty but chose to forgive them.

It raises an important principle that you really can't forgive someone until you see them as being guilty. That is why some people find it hard to forgive those who hurt them. What they do is to excuse their behaviour, instead of recognising their guilt and choosing to forgive them.

In Psalm 32 we read about the blessing of forgiveness

David wrote these words *32:1 Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. 2 Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.*

David spells out here the blessedness of being forgiven of various types of sins. God pardons the sinner and does not hold the sin against the sinner.

But how did David come to be able to make that declaration about the blessing of forgiveness in verse 1? Initially he refused to bring his sin before God, *32:3 For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. 4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.*

Eventually he truly repented. Vs 5, *"I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin."*

Note the 3 aspects involved in being forgiven by God. They all involve being open and honest before Him as David shows in these verses.

- Acknowledging sin. *32:5 "Then I acknowledged my sin to you"*
- Not hiding iniquity. *"and I did not hide my iniquity"*
- Confessing transgressions. *I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD."*

The result? God forgave him, *"and you forgave the guilt of my sin"*. David experienced the release of forgiveness. That is what he affirmed from personal experience in verses 1 and 2. *Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.* Verses 1 and 2 could not have been written until David opened his life to God and experienced His forgiveness.

Psalm 51. David Repents Of His Sin With Bathsheba

David asked God for mercy. *Psa 51:1) A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.*

Notice in this Psalm how David confesses his many sins and how he wants God to deal with them. Notice too how he wants God to change him to enable him to live to the glory of God.

These are the signs of true repentance. Asking for God's forgiveness for the past, and requesting His grace to be able to live to His glory from that time on.

Forgiveness for the past. David wanted God to deal with his past

Psa 51:2) Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!

Psa 51:9) Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

He knew he was guilty of iniquity and sin. He knew he needed cleansing.

He wanted God to deal with his future by cleansing, changing and empowering him

We notice in these verses the very strong words that David used in asking the Lord to deal with him. He needed to be purged and washed. He was confident that God would thoroughly cleanse him, *Psa 51:7) Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

David also knew that he needed to be changed from within. *(Psa 51:10) Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.*

He also knew that his sins would be a barrier between himself and God. So he not only asked for cleansing for his sins, but also for the full restoration of his relationship with God. *Psa 51:11) Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.*

There would be no deep abiding joy until that fellowship was restored. *Psa 51:12) Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.*

Other Word Pictures in the Old Testament

These Word pictures give more insight into the totality of God's forgiveness.

Sin Completely removed. *Ps 103:12 "as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us."* David here describes how God takes sins right away, to infinity.

The Stain of sin is removed. *Is 1:18 "Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool."*

Sin is blotted out and not remembered. *Is 43:25 "I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins."* There are those whom we encounter in healing ministries who feel that they are stained for life. Especially is this so in the lives of those who have been the victims of incest and sexual assault. Many such people have said that they feel that the stain on their life is obvious to all people. Praise God that many have also said that this truth has made them feel clean.

Sin is swept away. *Is 44: 22 "I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you."* In His physical world God is able to make clouds and mists disappear. In the same way God is able to get rid of our sins by dispersing them or evaporating them so He no longer sees them. In the same way He is able to blot out our sins so they no longer exist. He urges us to return to Him because He has set us free.

Sin is abundantly pardoned. *Is 55:7. "let the wicked ... return to our God, for he will abundantly pardon".* There is no limit to God's forgiveness. He longs to forgive, and to do so in abundance. There will never be a time when God says, "That's enough. No forgiveness from this time on. What do you think I am, a God of grace or something?" His grace can cover every sin, because the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

Sin is forgiven and not remembered. *Jer 31:34. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."* In His forgiving love God promises to remember sin no more. We note however that it does not say that God "forgets" our sins. (He is omniscient, knowing all

things. He cannot forget anything.) Rather the verse says that He chooses not to remember. In other words, He will not bring back those sins against us ever again.)

The guilt of sin is cleansed and the guilt of rebellion is forgiven. *Jer 33: 8* “I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me.” God not only deals with the sins but also the guilt arising from those sins.

No sin will be remembered. *Ezek 18:22* “None of the transgressions that he has committed shall be remembered against him; for the righteousness that he has done he shall live. This is another verse emphasising the completeness of our forgiveness from God.

God hides our sins behind His back. *Isa 38:17* Behold, it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness; but in love you have delivered my life from the pit of destruction, for you have cast all my sins behind your back. To have cast something behind our back is to say that thing is no longer in our sight. When God casts our sins behind His back it means He is no longer focusing on them. (Therefore no looking back on our part concerning things God has put behind Him!)

God buries our sins in depths of the sea. *Micah 7:19*, He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. (Therefore no fishing on our part!) In this verse God’s compassion is described as treading our iniquities underfoot. That is, He has taken authority over them and they no longer have any power in His sight. “Casting our sins into the depths of the sea” shows that He has dealt with them and they all no longer in His sight.

A Summary Of The Old Testament Passages

As we look at all these Old Testament passages we can see that when we repent and ask God to forgive us, He forgives us:-

absolutely
and completely
holding nothing against us

SOME NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGES

Jesus shed His blood so we could be forgiven. *Mat 26:28.* Jesus said at the Passover meal, “for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins”. Jesus here gave meaning to his forthcoming death. The shedding of His blood would inaugurate the new covenant. His blood would be poured out for many people. He also added for what purpose His blood would be shed. It was for the forgiveness of sins for all those who would seek forgiveness in Him.

Jesus saved us by His death and His life. *Rom 5:9-10*, Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. St Paul here affirms a number of truths. The shedding of Jesus’ blood means that we can be made right with God as we trust in Him. It also means that we will be saved from the wrath of God.

Thus sin has been dealt with through the shedding of his blood. The shedding of his blood through death means that sinners who trust in him have been reconciled to God. He will save them by His life in them.

Jesus' blood cleanses us from sin, 1 Jn 1:7, *and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin*. The shedding of Jesus' blood meant that all sin was able to be cleansed. It is a reminder to us that all sin, sin of various types and degrees, was covered over by the blood of Jesus.

What Is The Ground Of God's Forgiveness Of Us?

Paul put it simply in Ephesians 1:7-8 where he wrote that redemption and forgiveness are to be found in Jesus, *In Him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight.*

Again we have a number of truths in this one verse. Redemption and forgiveness stem from the grace of God. Redemption came through Jesus' blood (His death on a cross) and it is in Him (In Jesus Christ) that we have redemption and forgiveness. So where does our forgiveness reside? Where it to be found? In the person of Jesus Christ. Because we are "in Him" forgiveness is ours in Him.

If forgiveness for all our sins is ours in Him, should we be praying "Please, please" as we as believers ask for forgiveness OR should we ask for His forgiveness and immediately say, "Thank You, thank You?" The answer is simple. We should thank Him for the forgiveness for all our sins we HAVE in Jesus by His death for us on the cross. As the hymn puts it, *"His blood avails for me."*

So here is the answer to our Question No. 3. Jesus died on the cross (shed His blood) so that forgiveness of all sin might become available for all the people of God throughout history. Forgiveness is to be found in Him and in Him alone. Through our faith union with Christ as believers we are in Him, in whom we have forgiveness. We have forgiveness for all sins, past, present and future in Him. But we need to confess those sins and ask for His forgiveness to experience the release and freedom from being forgiven.

Question 4. "Why Should We Forgive? What Motivation Should We Have?"

Brief Synopsis:-

- Two motivations for forgiving others.
- The depth of our forgiveness from God.
- Our forgiveness of others.

Many people ask why should we go to the bother of forgiving sins of those who sinned against them? There is a double motivation in forgiving sins of other people.

The first motivation is this. God commands us to forgive. Jesus taught, *Luke 6:37 "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven."* St Paul taught that we must forgive others, Eph 4:32, *"forgiving one another"* and Col 3:13, *"so you also must forgive."*

The second motivation. God calls us to follow His example of forgiveness. To forgive in the same way He has already forgiven us, Eph 4:32, *"and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you."* AND Col 3:13 *"Bear with one*

another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

How much has the Lord forgiven us?

As the above OT and NT verses show us, God forgives us absolutely and completely, holding nothing against us.

How are we meant to forgive other people? God says we must forgive as completely as God forgave us. That is, absolutely and completely, holding nothing against the people we forgive. Eph 4:32. Col 3:13

Are humans able to forgive? We can forgive. "Forgive" in Eph 4:32 and in Col 3:13 is (charizomai) from (charis) grace. Grace from God was needed for our forgiveness. He graced us with something we could never earn or deserve. In forgiving others we "grace" them with something they could never deserve or earn from us. We act in grace towards them as we:-

- Choose to forgive them
- Cancel the debt they owe us
- Let them off the hook of our unforgiveness

God works within us by His Spirit to enlighten us as to the necessity of forgiving, to motivate us to forgive and to empower us to do so.

What should be our Christian attitude to those who make themselves our enemies?

- Gracious! Being gracious and acting in grace towards them.
- Loving not hating. Mat 5: 44, *Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.*
- Blessing and not cursing. Don't curse, but bless. Just like Jesus. 1 Pet 3:8-9 *have... love for one another ...do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called--that you might inherit a blessing.* For the Christian there is to be no place for revenge. Where people have behaved in a negative way towards us, we are to repay them in a positive way.
- We can experience and exhibit peace and forgiveness even when there appears to be no chance of reconciliation. Rom 12:18. *If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.* We are responsible for our own reactions and responses regardless of the attitude of our enemies towards us.
- We are not to continue to see ourselves as victims but as victors through His grace, love and power.

<h3>QUESTION 5. "What Is The Freedom That Comes From Forgiving?"</h3>
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Brief Synopsis:-

- The two main concepts regarding forgiveness.
- How we can forgive the other person.
- The need to affirm our forgiveness from God when situations or people don't change.

In summary there are two main concepts regarding forgiveness in the Bible

1). The first one is the release and freedom entailed in forgiveness. One word for "forgive", is (aphiemi), meaning to "let go", remit, to cancel the debt owed, to set someone free.

To "forgive" sets us free of bondage to our negative emotions, eg., anger, bitterness, resentment, etc.

To choose NOT to forgive holds us in bondage to those who hurt us. C.S. Lewis once wrote about the hurt he experienced at school. He found it difficult to forgive the person involved even much later as a senior experienced believer. As he put it, "*Forgiveness is a difficult thing*". But praise God he eventually wrote "*At last!*" as he learned to forgive and knew the freedom of forgiving.

Forgiveness also means releasing the person who hurt us, from the hook of our unforgiveness.

2). The second concept is that of pardon, imparting grace to those we forgive. (We saw this earlier as we looked at the word (charizomai) from (charis) grace. Some have found that as they extended the grace of forgiveness to another person, they themselves became more free.

How can I forgive the other person?

God has given us free-will. We can choose to forgive or not to forgive. It is an act of the will. "I choose to forgive".

We have our own personal, individual accountability before God. Only WE can choose to forgive anyone of anything they have done or said to us. No one else can do it for us.

God can't do it for us!!! He will not go against our will. But He can help us make the decision and carry it through.

Some have found it helpful to pray, "*Lord please work in my heart and make me willing to choose to forgive.*" However the choice to forgive is better made sooner than later. It is better made later than never at all. Forgiveness is all about choosing to forgive and seeking the Lord's help to do so.

The Need To Keep Affirming Our Forgiveness

We need to keep affirming our forgiveness:-

- Our forgiveness from God. It is ours in Him. Eph 1:7. We thank Him for what we have in Him. We don't have to plead for it or beg for it because forgiveness is ours in Jesus.
- Our forgiveness of others. Instead of going through the process of forgiving that person over and over again whenever a thought about them comes into our minds, we can adopt a different attitude. Knowing we have previously forgiven them of that particular sin we can say, "Lord, I thank You that You gave me the grace to forgive them. I affirm that I have forgiven them. In Jesus' name AMEN. "

We can do this even when the situations don't change and there appears to be no chance of reconciliation. We can do it even when the people involved don't change.

There is a deep theological truth about forgiveness that I like to share. It is found in these words, "*It only takes one to dance but 2 to tango.*" It only takes one person to forgive for that person to dance or walk in the wonderful liberating freedom of forgiveness.

Reconciliation is desirable but not always possible. It does take "2 to tango", to forgive each other in order to achieve a reconciliation. We may hope for it or long for it, but ultimately it needs the second person to decide to forgive and to seek reconciliation.

However we can have the victory in Jesus Christ as we do what He tells us to do in forgiving others! We can dance in the freedom of knowing we have done what God wanted us to do.

Unfortunately while the other person refuses to forgive, they can't dance in the freedom of their forgiveness. In love we pray that they may learn to forgive for their sake.

QUESTION 6. "What can I do if I ask the person I hurt to forgive me but they refuse to do so?"

Brief Synopsis:-

- The dilemma when the other person won't forgive us.
- What we can do to be free.

When we realised that we had hurt that other person we might have asked them to forgive us. They then faced a choice as to what to do. Their response may have been, *"I'll never forgive you. I want nothing more to do with you. I hope you rot in hell."* And they closed the doors to any future contact. Can there be any closure in such a situation?

Here is one answer. Remember that everyone is commanded by God to forgive the other person. For example, Jesus taught us to pray in the Lord's Prayer, *"forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation."* Lk 11:4. We need to forgive others as well as asking God to forgive us.

Jesus also said in In Luke 6:37 that we must forgive in order to be forgiven, *"Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven"*

All we need to do is to do what He tells us to do. That is to repent of our sin against that other person and then to humbly and sincerely ask the person we hurt to forgive us. They then have the choice. To do what God has told everyone person to do. That is to forgive. Or they can choose not to obey Him by refusing to forgive us. It is their choice, not ours. If we have been sincere in asking for their forgiveness then they are responsible for holding unforgiveness in their hearts.

It means that we have done the right thing in the sight of God and we can dance in the freedom of our forgiveness from Him. (Even though there is no reconciliation). But we need to pray for them, that for their sake, God might make them willing to forgive.

Question 7. "How can I forgive myself?"

Brief Synopsis:-

- The problem with the saying.
- Subjectivity and its shortcomings.
- Objective realities.
- A better way of helping people find the freedom of forgiveness.

There have been many people over the years who have asked me how they can learn to forgive themselves. It obviously is a problem when people think back to their hurtful comment or action against another person. They think to themselves, "How could I have been so silly to speak in such a way as to hurt that person?" They may recognise that though they have forgiven others who hurt them, they still have a problem forgiving themselves.

It is true that many people are very hard on themselves. They may have acted foolishly in some situation and caused harm to themselves or to other people. They may even have come before God and asked His forgiveness for what they said or did but they still don't have peace within. They may still have a deep sense of regret about the damage they caused to themselves or to others.

Friends may offer advice using these words, "*You must forgive yourself*" or similar words. It is a logical thing to do. The person has no peace and they need to move on. So you as a friend tell them to forgive themselves and to get on with life.

Sometimes this may be enough to snap people out of their fixation with their problem. But it may be only a temporary fix and a later lapse on the person's part takes them back to where they were before. They may perhaps now become even harder on themselves. It may in fact compound the problem. They knew they had been hard on themselves. They saw the need to be more gracious to themselves. They tried to forgive themselves. But the process was not successful. They may see it as yet another time in which they failed to forgive themselves.

What Is The Problem With The Saying?

We look at two scenarios.

i). The person is not a believer and has never confessed their sins to God.

The saying in this case only provides band-aid treatment that ultimately has no healing power in it. When we sin against another person we have also sinned against God, as Jesus had the prodigal son say in the parable, *Lk 15:18, I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.*

The effects of sin are like concentric circles with a ripple effect touching the lives of many people in varying degrees. The man who sexually abuses a little girl brings deep hurt to the girl but also affects her parents and other family members. The effects of his sin might later be seen in the girl's marriage and family life unless healing takes place beforehand.

It is of limited value to say to someone "You must forgive yourself" if the person has never confessed their sin to God and known His forgiveness and the peace that ensues from that.

ii). The person is a believer who has asked God to forgive his or her sins but is not at peace.

We may think, "Surely they are being too hard on themselves when God is so forgiving?" But the reality is that they are. They may have tried confessing the same sins over and over to God and yet continue berating themselves for their foolishness in sinning in the first place. Why then is "You must forgive yourself!" often inadequate as a means of trying to help people?

- a) It is very subjective. It focuses on what the person feels. As we know, feelings can fluctuate all over the place. Willing ourselves to forgive ourselves doesn't necessarily bring any peace.
- b) It raises questions that are not easy to answer. For example
 - How will you know when to forgive yourself? Did you sin by not doing it sooner?
 - When will you know if you have forgiven yourself properly? Were you really sincere in asking yourself to forgive yourself? Were you really sincere when you forgave yourself?
 - Have you forgiven yourself of everything or are you still holding on to some unforgiveness towards yourself in some areas?

- What happens if having forgiven yourself you still don't feel at peace?
 - What happens if you do or say the same things again that bring hurt in another's life?
- c) It obscures the basis on which forgiveness is made possible. We don't just sin against ourselves when we sin. We sin against God by breaking His laws and by not calling upon His grace and strength to enable us not to sin.
- The basis of all forgiveness is the shed blood of Jesus on the cross which has made forgiveness available for every sin. Forgiveness from God comes in no other way.
 - So it is not enough to say "I forgive myself?" because forgiveness is not on the basis of what I say to myself no matter how kind and gracious I might be to myself.
 - Rather forgiveness becomes mine on the basis of what Christ has done for me and my willingness to appropriate it in Him.

A better way of helping people "feel" forgiven

If the term "You must forgive yourself?" is linked with subjectivity how can we introduce objectivity into the situation?

By turning back to reality! The following facts are true:-

- Sin matters to God and He had to do something about it because humans couldn't do it for themselves. Paul wrote about our human inability to save ourselves in Rom 5:6-8, *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*
- God sent His Son Jesus into the world to die for the sins of humankind. Jn 3:16-18, *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.*
- Forgiveness for our sin is available to the children of God in Christ. Eph 1:7, *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace*
- Those who turn to Him to ask for His forgiveness are forgiven. 1Jn 1:9 *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*
- The truth is that God remembers our sin no more as we confess it before him. He will not bring it back against us ever again, Isa 43:25 *"I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.*

These are objective truths that never change. The world may change, our opinions may change, our feelings will certainly change, but God and the truths of His word remain constant, Mal 3:6 *"For I the LORD do not change..."*

Reality is seeing things as God sees them and as He describes them in His word. Reality is not what we feel about the things God says in His word.

Faith is believing what God has said in His word and acting on those truths regardless of feelings.

Encouraging people to face up to reality and to act on it

We can help people learn to recognise that there are truths in this world that never change. They are objective truths that can and should be acted on. On the basis of those truths we can encourage people to do the following instead of “forgiving themselves”.

- 1) Ask God’s forgiveness in Christ for anything that you feel guilty about. The blood of Jesus covers every sin and as we ask God for forgiveness, we can have the assurance that God hears our requests and forgives us in Christ.
- 2) Having asked God to forgive you of our sins you can then thank Him for forgiving you in Jesus. He said He would. That is the objective truth whether you feel forgiven or not.
- 3) Keep on affirming that forgiveness which you already HAVE in Jesus. The more we affirm something the more it becomes concrete in our experience. Eph 1:7-8, “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight.”
- 4) Recognise that the highest JUDGE in the universe has pronounced you “Not guilty!” in Christ. He remembers your sin no more. There is no other court of appeal. The ultimate perfect judge has spoken and you are forgiven of the things you confessed to Him. Feelings must not be allowed to appeal when the verdict from the Supreme Judge has been given.
- 5) What right have you to hold things against yourself when He doesn’t? If He erases your sins, remembers them no more, casts them into the depths of the sea, and hides them behind His back, what right have you to dwell on them?
- 6) Learn to focus on the fact of your forgiveness from God and keep affirming it to yourself in praise and thanksgiving to Him. Don’t let your thoughts focus on subjectivity (how you feel) but turn them to the objective truth of God’s grace towards you in forgiveness. Paul wrote about his thought life in 2 Cor 10:5, as he described how he had victory in his thought life, *2Co 10:5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.*

You can ask Christ to break the pattern of negative thinking in your mind to allow you to focus on reality, on the objective truths in His word that can set you free.

As we minister to others, instead of saying to them, “You must forgive yourself!” you can say “Praise God that He has forgiven you completely in Christ and that He is holding nothing against you.”

In other words keep pointing them to reality, what God says (the objective truths) rather than letting them give way to subjective feelings. The truth is what God says about you in His word. It is not what you feel about yourself.

<p>Question 8. “Some Folk Tell Me That I Need To Forgive God To Be More Healed. What Do You Think?”</p>
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Brief Synopsis:-

- “You must forgive God!” Why people suggest it and some of the problems with the saying.
- Biblical truths to keep in mind.
- A godly aim.
- A godly aim has to be achieved in godly ways.
- Dealing healthily with our relationship with God
- A suggested Prayer.

The first time I heard this saying, “You must forgive God!” was at a meeting of ministers. One of those invited to speak at the meeting talked about his ministry as a Chaplain. He described how he tried to break down the barriers some people had towards God. Part of the process he said was this, “I get them to forgive God.”

I could understand his thinking in the sense that if the people had a barrier towards God, they needed to get rid of it. So instead of holding a lingering resentment against God, he encouraged them to get rid of that barrier by forgiving God. He stated that it seemed to help some people.

I understood his logic but disagreed with it. I told him that I felt it was not really helpful to get people to do that. Some discussion followed. As we left the meeting a senior Bishop said, “I agree with what you said. It’s almost blasphemous isn’t it?” We both respected the minister involved but had concerns about the saying.

Why then do some folk encourage people to forgive God? The minister gave one explanation. Many people blame God for some or all of the adverse things that happened in their lives. They believe for example, that He failed them in not providing for them or in allowing some tragedy to happen in their lives. Because of that they maintain a hardened attitude towards God. Naturally that hardness has to be removed before such people are willing to draw on the love and grace of God.

Other people have suggested that of course one can’t really forgive God but when people are encouraged to do it and feel a bit better as a result, they can then ask Him to forgive their presumption in “forgiving” Him. So in that sense it is helpful he suggested.

What does the Bible have to say about this concept of ‘forgiving God?’

A). BIBLICAL TRUTHS TO KEEP IN MIND

1. One can only forgive someone who is guilty of sin. If no sin has occurred then there is nothing to forgive.
2. God has never sinned and never will.
 - Abraham declared before God his confidence in Him, *Gen 18:25 ... Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?"*
 - Moses praised God in his song. *Deut 32:4 "The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.*
 - David spoke these words before God when He delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul (*2Sam 22:31*) *This God--his way is perfect; the word of the LORD proves true; he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him.* (Also in Ps 18:30)
 - Jesus spoke of His Father as being perfect. (*Mat 5:48*) *You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*
 - James wrote of God’s unchangeable nature. *Jas 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*
3. If we think God has sinned against us in some way, is our opinion of Him right or wrong?

It is obvious that our opinion is wrong and needs to be repented of. God is a God who loves to give and especially to those who love His Son.

- As Paul wrote of His generous love, *Eph 2:4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved-- 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.* We see in this passage, references to many of the attributes of God, such as His rich mercy, His great love, the immeasurable riches of His grace and also His kindness. He is motivated to care and provide for His children.
- His attitude to His children is seen especially in Romans 8:31-32. Paul assures his readers that God is on their side against all their enemies, *Rom 8:31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?* His love for His children is seen especially in the fact that He gave Jesus to die for them, *8:32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all.* Paul goes on in that verse to say that if God was motivated to give His Son then He will be motivated to give His children all things in him, *how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*
- God's purposes for His people are good. Jeremiah wrote that God has plans for His people. They are positive plans to bring purpose and blessing into the lives of His people, *Jer 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.* These words are applicable for the people of God throughout all generations.
- Paul expressed it as God working all things for good for His people, *Rom 8:28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.* We as God's children may not always recognise His purposes but we can be assured that He is in control of all things and that He cares about us.

4. God commands us to do many things such as to worship Him, to love Him, to obey Him, to serve Him etc, but never does He command us to forgive Him. Why should He if He has never done anything wrong?

5. God is never the originator of evil. He may allow it in His world, but He does not introduce it.

- Joseph saw the over-ruling hand of God in all that happened to him. His brothers may have had evil intent in their treatment of him but Joseph saw that God had over-ruled their sin to preserve a generation through him. *Gen 50:20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.*
- In a Psalm that speaks so much of the sin of humankind, David wrote that no evil can be associated with God, *Ps 5:4 For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you.*
- James saw that God is not evil, nor can He be tempted to commit evil, *Jas 1:13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil. He does not tempt his people to do evil, and he himself tempts no one.*
- Paul wrote that God may allow temptation but He also provides the way of escape so that people need not sin. *1Cor 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the*

temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. It may be that we yield to temptation because we are not aware of the escape God has provided for us.

6. We sin against God when we accuse Him of evil. It is blasphemous to look at what God does in His world and call it evil. That was the sin of many of the Jewish leaders who saw God at work through Jesus and described its origin as being evil.

It is also blasphemous to look at the course of our own lives and to accuse God of not loving us or caring for us as He should have. We exist in this world only because of His grace and love. These have been extended to us day by day and hour by hour. It is even more blasphemous to say that God is capable of initiating any form of evil against us. The problems we get into as humans are usually the result of other humans acting towards us in unloving ways. Sometimes our own foolishness or sin brings us into difficult situations. They are not caused directly by God.

7. It is sheer presumption to think that humans can stand in judgment of God. God is infinite and beyond all human judgment. Finite beings are not in a position to judge God the infinite. His thoughts and His ways are far beyond the capability of humans to understand. God spoke through Isaiah in Is 55:7-9, *let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. 8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. 9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.* Created beings will never be in a position to pass judgement on God's character or on His ways. They are finite creatures. He is the infinite creator.

B). A GODLY PURPOSE MUST BE ACHIEVED IN GODLY WAYS

There is an old saying that says "The end does not justify the means". It is true in the sense that the way to establish a good end (or result) requires a good means of achieving it. To achieve a godly end, godly means have to be used.

The goal of lessening a person's hostility against God is a wonderful goal. However the way to achieve that goal has to be godly as well. A godly "means" does not mean attributing guilt to God who is never guilty and never needs to be forgiven.

It is the truth that sets humans free, not lies. Jesus reminded His Jewish followers of this fact, *Jn 8:31 So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

To accuse God of being or doing evil is a lie or comes from deception. Satan as we have seen is called is "diabolos" the accuser. He functions through lies and deception. We see this even in Genesis where the serpent tried to confuse Eve saying, Gen 3:1 ... *"Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"* Eve replied, Gen 3:2 *"We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, 3 but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'"*

The serpent then told Eve a lie, *Gen 3:4 "You will not surely die"*. He followed that with a besmirching of the character of God. *3:5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be*

opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. In other words, “Don’t trust God. He is a liar trying to deceive you.”

Jesus taught that Satan was a liar, *Jn 8:44 You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.* Satan tries to prevent people from hearing and responding to the truth that can set them free, *Mk 4:15 And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them.*

Paul saw unregenerate humankind as under the power of Satan. Satan desired to keep people bound in darkness and in his power, so that they did not turn to God for acceptance and forgiveness. *Acts 26:18 to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'*

Satan as the accuser is opposed to God and to His purposes for humankind. He deceives mankind and tries to blacken the character of God by saying He has evil intents.

My very deep concern with encouraging people to “forgive God” is that, to some extent, we may be doing the Devil’s work for him. We are suggesting to the people we are trying to help, that God may have sinned against them and therefore needs to be forgiven.

If we start people on the process of forgiving God, where will it end? Instead of encouraging them to see the loving hand of God in the circumstances around them, we are encouraging them to look for faults in God that they can then “graciously forgive”. The concept of forgiving God is dangerous stuff indeed!

C). DEALING HEALTHILY WITH OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

How then can we help people who feel some degree of anger or resentment against God? We do it by stressing the truths found in the word of God. These are some suggestions that do work in practice. The people who feel angry or resentful against God need to do the following:-

1. Recognise that God is perfect in all His ways, and that His promises are to be believed and acted on. Reality is not what people feel. Rather it is what God says in His word. His word describes the loving nature of God who has done so much for humankind in sending Jesus to die for sinners and to reconcile them back to Himself. They need to feed on the passages which describe His love for us in Jesus, so that they learn to overcome their unjustified resentment through a better understanding of God’s nature.
2. Recognise that God is so much greater than we are. His ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts, for they are "higher" than ours, *Is 55:8-9.* God knows exactly what He is doing in His world. He is in complete control. We may have thoughts about what is happening in the world and what God may be doing, but we can never fully comprehend the incomprehensible wisdom of God.

His ways are also beyond our limited understanding. We may think that God should work in a particular way as we pray about a situation but God often does something completely different in that situation. Only later do we see that His answer was far better than we might have imagined.

3. Confess any anger or resentment on our part against Him as sin. God demands our total love and our trust. So anger and resentment have to go. They cannot be excused or held on to. “Confessing” our sin means acknowledging our sin before God and calling it by its true name “sin”.

He has done nothing wrong. So instead of “forgiving God” as a means of getting rid of our resentment against Him we ask Him to forgive us for our resentment. There is no such thing as “our justified resentment” against God! There can never be!

4. We must ask Him to forgive US for harbouring negative feelings towards Him. God hasn’t sinned in His relationship with us. We have sinned as humans. As David showed in the Psalms, we humans can tell God exactly how we feel and can even question His ways. But the time must come when we cease from harbouring those negative thoughts and emotions and humbly submit ourselves to Him. We do it without necessarily getting all the answers we were seeking. We need to get right with Him as soon as possible through confessing our sins, receiving His forgiveness and moving on in our Christian pilgrimage.

5. The fault is not with God but with our distorted picture of God.

Our God is unchanging. He has a track-record of caring for His people. If our concept of God does not fully appreciate all He is and all He has done for us in Jesus, then the picture we have of God in our minds has to change. It is a distorted picture coming from the pain we may have experienced and from believing the lies of the enemy.

Having confessed our sins against God we can ask Him to break any wrong pattern of thinking about Him we may have had, and to renew our minds according to the truth of His word.

A SUGGESTED PRAYER (For someone to pray who has been angry at the Lord)
Heavenly Father, I confess before you that I have often been angry at You and blamed You for many of the difficult things that have happened in my life.
I repent of my arrogance in judging You and suggesting that some of Your ways were uncaring or evil.
I repent of such thinking and I ask You to forgive me for the sin of blackening your character and of thinking and speaking evil of you.
I ask you to heal me of the damage that was done to me throughout my life. Enable me to understand just how loving You are, so that I might respond to Your love and grace, in a way that brings healing to me and glory to Your name.
Fill me with your Holy Spirit so that I might become more whole and healed to be able to love You and serve You for the rest of my life. AMEN