

Freely Forgiven

By Dr. Charles Stanley

“How could God ever forgive me? You don’t know what I’ve done.”

“How could I have done such an awful thing? I can never forgive myself.”

As a pastor, these are similar to questions I hear from people who have never fully understood God’s forgiveness. When we do not realize how the Lord’s mercy applies to our daily lives, the result is bondage, which stifles our ability to love and accept others. It also chokes the abundant life that Christ promised to those of us who believe.

Forgiveness is “the act of setting someone free from an obligation resulting from a wrong done against you.” For example, a debt is forgiven when you free the offender of his responsibility to pay back what he owes you. True forgiveness, then, involves three elements, all of which are necessary: an *injury*, a *debt* resulting from the injury, and a *cancellation of the debt*.

In God’s economy, sin creates a deficit; that is, something is taken or demanded from the sinner. What He ultimately requires of the transgressor is death:

The Lord God commanded the man, saying, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die” ([Gen. 2:16-17](#)).

The result of their sin was that death came into the world—not only physical death but also eternal separation from God ([Rev. 20:15](#)).

Why did God not immediately snuff out the lives of Adam and Eve? Why does He not do the same for all sinners? The answer is simple yet life-changing in its profundity: There is something God desires more than retribution for the disrespect shown Him—He wants fellowship with us.

He cared enough about Adam and Eve to slay an animal and make garments of skin to cover their nakedness and hide their shame ([Gen. 3:17](#)). This was the beginning of the sacrificial system that restored the fellowship between God and His people.

God was willing to move quickly to reinstate fellowship with Adam and Eve, and He will do the same for us today. In light of His mercy, shouldn’t we likewise extend forgiveness to those who have wronged us?

God doesn’t look at sins on a case-by-case basis to determine whether He will grant forgiveness. During Old Testament times, any person could receive atonement for transgressions simply by following prescribed steps. Similarly, to anyone desiring forgiveness today, it is freely available through Christ’s death on the cross:

“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us” ([Eph. 1:7-8](#)).

Notice that forgiveness is “according to the riches of His grace.” Scripture is clear that forgiveness is a *gift*, available for the asking ([1 John 1:9](#)). The details of what we have done, why we did it, and how many times we did it are irrelevant.

Are there sins from your past that continue to hang over you like a cloud? Do you doubt that God hears you because of sinful choices you've made? Do you feel that your potential for the kingdom of God has been destroyed?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you have not yet come to grips with God's solution to your sin. You are still holding on to a way of thinking that can keep you in bondage for the rest of your days on earth. You have set yourself up for a defeated life in which you will never reach your potential in the kingdom of God.

God wants you to be free. And because He does, He sacrificed what was dearest to Him. I encourage you to meditate on the concepts in this article. Ask God to sink them deep into your heart so they become the grid through which you interpret the experiences of life. When you can see yourself as a forgiven child, you will be able to enjoy fellowship with the Father, which was made possible by the death of His Son. Then you can begin to fulfill His marvelous calling on your life.

Adapted from *The Gift of Forgiveness*, by Charles F. Stanley, 1991.