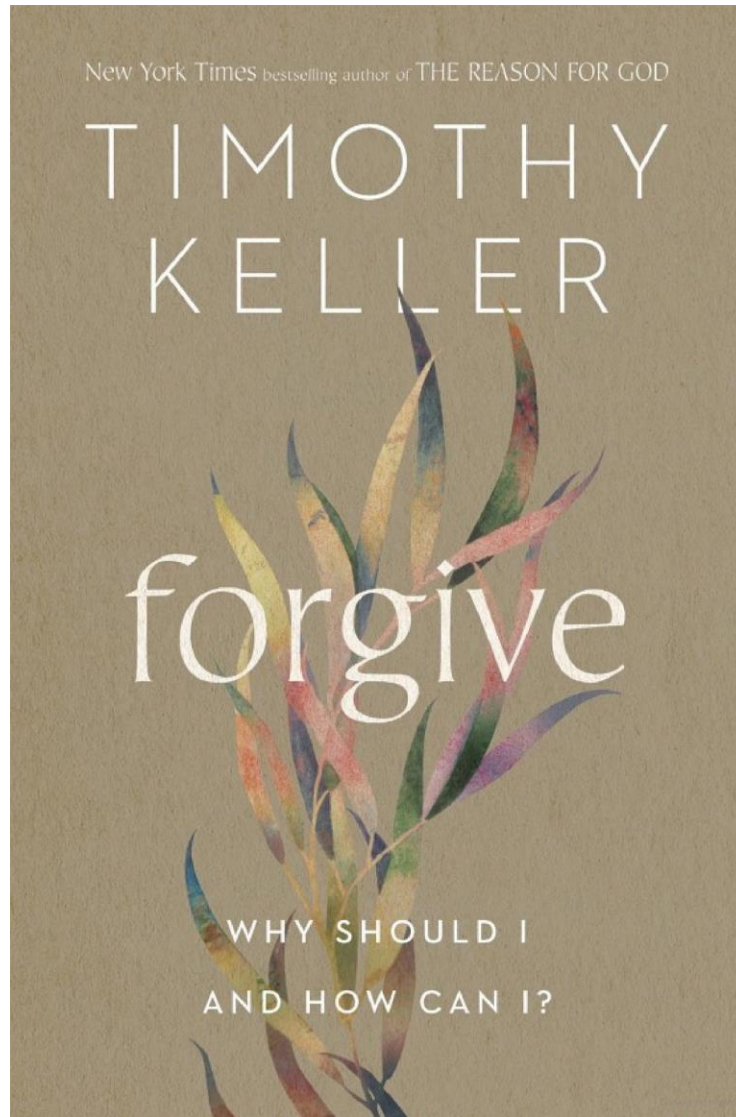


# Resentment and Restoration

Finding Hope through the Gospel

# *Forgive: Why Should I and How Can I?*



# Introduction

- Forgiveness is rooted in justice, the administration of what you deserve
- It is not the same as reconciliation
- While all recognize the importance of forgiveness, there's widespread debate about how to understand forgiveness and live it out
- Many in our late-modern age question whether grave offenses should ever be forgiven
- Even Christians who pray “forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us” struggle to agree on a basic definition

# Countering Current Obstacles to Forgiveness

- Is there a non-Christian basis for forgiveness?
- **Therapeutic forgiveness**—the view that forgiveness is a private decision to let go of your anger so you can have peaceful emotions. There is no concern for the perpetrator (29–31)
- Instead, Keller argues that biblical forgiveness means absorbing the debt and refraining from revenge. The ground motive is to honor God—to forgive *as* he has forgiven you
- **Merited forgiveness**—the view that forgiveness is transactional. I will forgive you if you change or that you have suffered enough as you have made me suffer (32-33)
- Instead, Keller argues that this is really a form of revenge

# Biblical Forgiveness

- “This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, <sup>10</sup> your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. <sup>11</sup> Give us today our daily bread. <sup>12</sup> And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. <sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one’” (Matt 6:9-13)
- The prayer assumes that those whom God forgives in turn forgive others (Matt 6:14-15)
- Biblical forgiveness is the decision to “let go” of resentment and not demand repayment for a hurt or loss, akin to canceling a debt
- It is rooted in God’s own act of [grace](#) and mercy, where he forgives human sins through Jesus’ sacrifice

# Forgiveness Proves Our Belief of the Gospel

- “And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins” (Mark 11:25)
- When praying for God’s intervention, we must be willing to extend God’s mercy (underserved kindness) to others
- “If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. <sup>4</sup> Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying ‘I repent,’ you must forgive them” (Luke 11:3-4)
- Believers are to forgive others as our indebtedness to God’s grace

# Definition of Forgiveness (Keller)

- Name the trespass truthfully as wrong and punishable, rather than merely excusing it
- Identify with the perpetrator as a fellow sinner rather than thinking how different from you he or she is
- Release the wrongdoer from liability by absorbing the debt yourself rather than seeking revenge and paying them back
- Aim for reconciliation rather than breaking off the relationship forever

# Forgiveness: Event or Process?

- Forgiveness is granted (event) before it's felt (process)
- It's a promise before God not to take revenge on a wrongdoer for his or her sin against you
- Making that promise entails three practical commitments—you promise
  - not to constantly bring the sin up to *the wrongdoer* in order to punish him or her
  - not to constantly bring the sin up to *other people* in order to hurt the wrongdoer's reputation and relationship with others
  - not to constantly bring the sin up to *yourself*—let it go



# Forgiveness and Healthy Boundaries

- To forgive someone who wronged you does not mean you have to immediately trust him or her
- Trust has to be re-earned. To forgive is to reject vengeance or payback for the wrong—it is not to act as if the wrong never happened
- If the wrongdoer hasn't repented, then you shouldn't make it easy for her to sin against you again
- It is *never* loving to someone to make it easy for her to sin against you
- And yet you must be open to rebuilding trust slowly if the wrongdoer shows what looks like genuine repentance

# Forgiveness and Healthy Boundaries

- Every case differs, of course—and in the case of real egregious abuse, it would be wrong to insist the abused persons put themselves in harm's way
- For examples of how you forgive not just “regular sinners” but “fools and evil persons,” see Dan Allender and Tremper Longman’s book [Bold Love](#)
- There are some ingenious examples of how you show an abusive person you’re still open to him if he changes, but if he isn’t changing, you won’t allow him to sin against you for even one minute

# Paul's Letter to Philemon

- This letter was written during one of Paul's many imprisonments either in Rome or in Ephesus
- It is Paul's shortest letter—25 verses
- It is the most occasional of Paul's letters
- It was accepted into the NT canon for its unique contributions, particularly as a potent illustration of forgiveness and the breaking down of social and cultural barriers

# The Backstory

- The backstory involves Philemon, who was a well-to-do Roman citizen and likely met Paul during his mission in Ephesus and became a believer
- Philemon helped start a church in Colossae together with Epaphras, a co-worker of Paul (vv. 1-2; cf. 1:7)
- Like many wealthy people at that time, Philemon owned a slave named Onesimus
- Somehow Onesimus wronged Philemon in some way (theft?) and ran away
- Later, Onesimus came to Paul in prison and appealed to him for help
- In the process, he became a Christian and a beloved assistant to Paul

# The Approach

- Paul tries to get Philemon to embrace Onesimus as a brother, no longer as a slave
- Verses 1-7 describe Paul's approach to the situation:
- <sup>1</sup> Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker— <sup>2</sup> also to Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier—and to the church that meets in your home: <sup>3</sup> Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, <sup>5</sup> because I hear about your love for all his holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup> I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ. <sup>7</sup> Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people.

# The Approach

- Verses 4-5 represent Paul's prayer, where he thanks God for Philemon's love and faithfulness
- This sets up v. 6, where Paul writes: <sup>6</sup>I pray that your **partnership** with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ.
- The term "partnership" translates the Greek word *koinonia*, which means sharing or mutual participation
- What Paul is saying is that faithfulness to Jesus means recognizing that all his followers are equal partners, who share together in the gift of God's love and grace

# The Request

- <sup>8</sup> Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, <sup>9</sup> yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. It is as none other than Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus— <sup>10</sup> that I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. <sup>11</sup> Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me. <sup>12</sup> I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you. <sup>13</sup> I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. <sup>14</sup> But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary. <sup>15</sup> Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever— <sup>16</sup> no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord. <sup>17</sup> So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. <sup>18</sup> If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. <sup>19</sup> I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self. <sup>20</sup> I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.

# The Request

- Paul identifies himself with Onesimus as his son in the faith (v. 10)
- Then comes Paul's bold request (vv. 15-16):
- <sup>15</sup> Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever— <sup>16</sup> no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.
- Paul wants Philemon to receive Onesimus back, no longer as a slave, but as a beloved brother in the Lord
- Under Roman law, Philemon had every legal right to have Onesimus punished or put in prison
- Instead, Philemon should receive him back as a social equal, a family member



# The Request

- Paul explains why should Philemon do as requested (vv. 17-19):
- <sup>17</sup> So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. <sup>18</sup> If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. <sup>19</sup> I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self.
- Paul wants Philemon to accept Onesimus back as a “partner” as if he were Paul himself
- Whatever Onesimus has done wrong, Philemon should charge Paul for Onesimus’ wrongdoing and Paul will repay it himself
- To facilitate reconciliation, Paul puts himself in the place of Jesus Christ
- As partners, they are all equal in Christ, not as slave and master (Col 3:11)

# Final Closure

- The letter does not reveal Philemon's response
- Paul closes the letter by stating his confidence that Philemon will do what Paul requested (vv. 21-25):
- <sup>21</sup> Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask. <sup>22</sup> And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers. <sup>23</sup> Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. <sup>24</sup> And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers. <sup>25</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

# Conclusions

- This letter is unique in that Paul does not mention Jesus' death and resurrection
- This gap is intentional and significant
- Paul doesn't explain the cross with words because he is demonstrating the gospel with his actions
- Paul embodies the cross of Jesus by putting himself in the place through which Philemon and Onesimus are reconciled to God and to each other
- In Christ, people's values, social status, are not defined by race, gender, social or economic class

# Discipleship Pointers

- “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, <sup>27</sup> and do not give the devil a foothold” (Eph 4:26-27)
- This verse encourages people to resolve their anger before the end of the day, preventing bitterness and giving the devil no opportunity to cause further harm
- The advice is not to suppress anger, but to address it promptly and constructively to maintain relationships and inner peace, rather than letting it fester and destroy from within
- Spiritual warfare is real and the evil one seeks to harm the church

# Discipleship Pointers

- The gospel prescribes forgiveness as more costly to the offended more than the offender
- Christ's death on the cross is the ultimate example of love and grace
- We must learn to forgive others, just as Christ forgave us of our sin