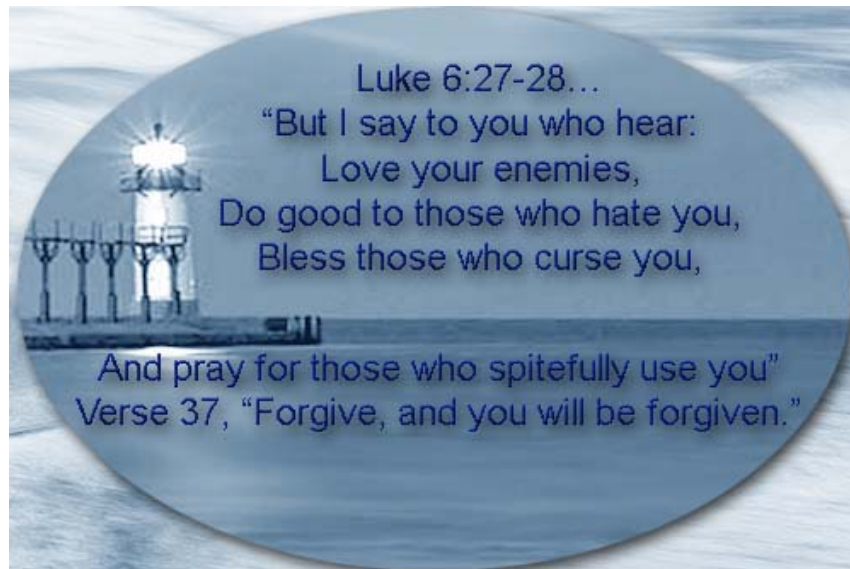


## FORGIVENESS

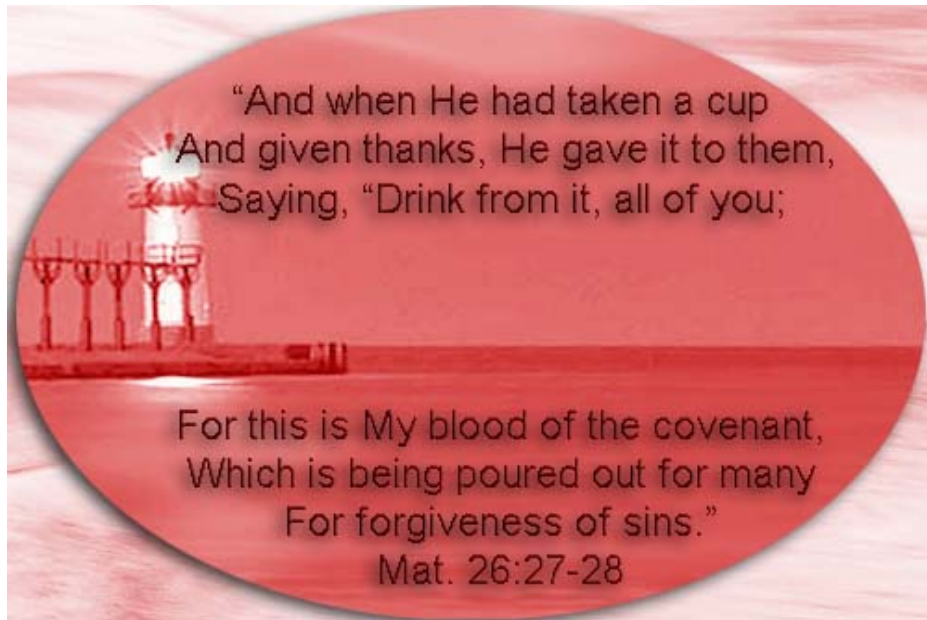


Jesus' command to forgive leaves no doubt as to the fact that forgiveness is a command from God and not just an option. In Mark 11:25, Jesus said: "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses." In other words, if we don't forgive, Jesus tells us to not waste our time praying because obviously God won't hear our prayers.

If we stop for an instant and reflect on the fact that if we have made God our focus in life through the salvation of Christ, we have effectively put ourselves under His Kingdom and submission. Therefore, it goes without saying that when God asks us to forgive, we're surely not given an option but a mere command. Would a soldier refuse an order from his leader? Paul in Eph. 4:32 said, "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you."

The Christian faith is based on one and only one principle... the forgiveness of sin through the sacrifice of Christ Jesus. If God went through such an outreach and painful sacrifice to draw us to Him and forgive us our sins, shouldn't we be grateful in obeying God through forgiving others?

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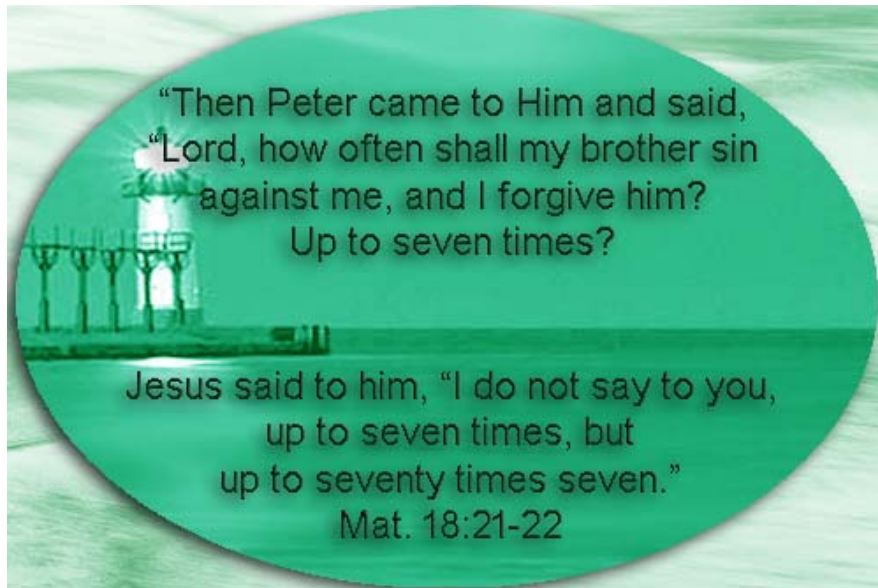


What is the intent and meaning of forgiveness to God? The featured scripture gives us a clear picture of the importance that God puts on forgiveness, having Himself paid the ultimate price so that we may be forgiven.

The prophet Micah put it this way: “Who is a God like You, who pardons wrongdoing and passes over a rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy.” Micah 7:18. In essence, God loves mercy! In Psalm 103:13-14, David said, “Just as a father has compassion on *his* children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him. For He Himself knows our form; He is mindful that we are *nothing but dust.*”

So we can easily conclude that God is compassionate, merciful, and as well He demonstrated it in a clear and powerful way. Therefore, it should leave no doubt in our hearts as to what is the core reason for God to desire we show the same mercy to others through forgiveness. That’s why Paul said in Eph. 6:31-32, “Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”

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Ever heard someone say, "I forgive you, but..." Now, how many of us have ever forgiven anyone 490 times? In reality, forgiveness is a difficult and challenging act of love that is not only frees the person who offended us, but also frees us from carrying hatred in our hearts. Psalm 103:12 states, 'As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.'

That adds another aspect of forgiveness in that we're to remember no more that a person has offended us. Then, Jesus on the cross just before He gave His last breath said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." Luke 23:34. Even Stephen, as he was being stoned to death cried, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." Acts 7:60.

So, to what extent should forgiveness reach out? The apostle Paul in Hebrews 10:16-17 brought up Jeremiah's prophecy confirming the Holy Spirit's work in and for the believer, "This *is* the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them," *then He adds*, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." In other words, forgiveness is unconditional and forever. Agree?

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Forgiveness goes both ways. We must seek forgiveness from God, and as well grant forgiveness to whomever offends us. Acts 3:19 says. "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." In essence, God's forgiveness encompasses having every single sin throughout our lives completely blotted out, gone. Forgiveness, we know, is at the very core of God's message of salvation, and implies acknowledging that we are sinners, realizing that Christ died for our sins, and in turn ask God for forgiveness. If God, Holy as He is, will forgive us unconditionally through the surrender of our lives, shouldn't we even more, we who are sinners, forgive others who offend us? In addition, if we as believers try to hold to and hide sins, we should expect the Lord will allow trials and challenges to come our way to bring us back on track and seek His forgiveness.

Let's remember that we are required to forgive those who offend us in any way. In Matthew 5:7, Jesus said, "Blessed *are* the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." Unforgiveness on the other hand will bring bitterness, hatred, and as Jesus said, we shouldn't expect to be forgiven if we don't forgive others. Is there anyone we haven't forgiven?

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