

Do Not Confuse Forgiveness with Reconciliation (Luke 6:37)

1. Forgiveness is unilateral and requires nothing from the offending party.

A. In forgiveness, the offended party pays the “damage (fine)” of that sin (personal):

- Forgiveness is not merited or earned on behalf of the offending party but instead freely given without any conditions. Forgiveness has no stipulations, requires nothing from the offending party, and often occurs without the offender's knowledge.
- In forgiveness, the offended party pays the “fine” that would otherwise be due unto them. This “fine” can include physical or emotional costs, dishonor, or a combination.
- The “payment” of forgiveness is often tied to the spiritual bank account of the offended party.
- Once forgiveness is granted, the memory of the sin conjures up no ill feelings of bitterness, wrath, or indebtedness because the sin has already been covered (to be remembered no more) by the offended party. There is no future “charging” of wrongdoing by the offended party since the “fine” has been paid (Prov. 17:9; 1 Pet. 4:8).

B. God obligates the Christian always to forgive in every situation:

- The Christian is commanded to forgive, regardless of the sin (Col. 3:13), as forgiveness operates independently of the offending party. Unforgiveness rests solely on the authority and capacity of the offended party to forgive.
- The degree to which a professing Christian forgives will be in proportion to their spiritual maturity, walk with God, and progressive sanctification as a sinner growing in the knowledge of how much he (or she) has been forgiven.
- The offending party has no authority to “demand” forgiveness. Instead, they may appeal to the party they offended and to the grace and mercy of God in Christ.
- Horizontally (man to man), forgiveness is always granted in mercy. Vertically, it is commanded and responsive to mercy received.

In forgiveness, the offending party owes the offended party nothing because forgiveness is unilateral and independent of the offending party doing or saying anything.

Once a Christian has forgiven that sin (or sins) against them, there is no future “charge” of indebtedness since the offended party has chosen to pay the fine (overlook) the sin. In forgiveness, the offended party assumes all liability and payments that the offending party would otherwise have to pay through reconciliation.

In forgiveness, the offended party is “withdrawing” grace and mercy from their spiritual bank account, which never diminishes. Instead of diminishing, the disciple's spiritual bank account always increases as his awareness of God's kindness and mercy toward him increases. God also gives grace to the humble (Jas. 4:6-7; 1 Pet. 5:5-6).

In forgiveness, the offended party is liberated from the conditions otherwise necessitated by reconciliation. While forgiveness is always granted freely, trust and intimacy must be earned, preserved, and restored (if lost).

If bitterness, resentment, ill feelings, or malice consumes the Christian's mind, body, or soul, he or she has not truly forgiven the offending party. The disciple is directed to forgive (v.37).

2. Reconciliation is bilateral and dependent on both parties agreeing to the terms necessary to restore the damaged relationship.

Reconciliation: the process of restoring two (or more) parties estranged from one another. This estrangement can be “perceived” by at least one of the parties or “present” by at least one of the parties and has “degrees” of separation.

In reconciliation, the offending party owes the offended party something. Reconciliation:

- requires both parties to agree on the sins committed and proper “restitution” or “payment plan” to restore the relationship.
- is required when the offended party has no more money to “withdraw” from the shared relational bank account.

What is this “payment plan” and “bank account”?

- the payment plan is whatever the offended party believes is required from the offending party for the relationship to be restored. It is their “debt.”
- Depending on the severity and frequency of the sin, this “payment” may take several forms that range from an apology to financial restitution.
- The bank account is the shared relational capital between both parties. Depending on severity and frequency, every sin committed is a “withdrawal” from the shared bank account. Every “deposit” increases the relational capital and can take several forms. The substance of the deposit is always how the other party is “loved” and “valued.”

The typical “reconciliation” payment plan:

- A. Verbal acknowledgment: acknowledging the sin committed, with no excuses, as the offending party assumes full responsibility for the sin(s) committed (Prov. 28:13). There is no self-pity (which is a form of pride) nor any type of manipulation on behalf of the offending party.
- B. Time: a genuine repentance of the sin is only observed through time.
- C. Accountability: willingness to be held accountable by others.
- D. Any additional restitution, if possible.

Reconciliation can be complicated:

- Sometimes, the offending party is unaware that they have sinned. The burden is always on the plaintiff to demonstrate that sin has been committed.
- Sometimes, the offended party confuses personal preferences with sin.
- Sometimes, the offended party does not desire reconciliation and needs time.
- Sometimes, the offending party does not desire reconciliation.
- Sometimes, it is unwise for the offended party to be reconciled with the offending party.
- Sometimes the offended party conjures up unreal and unreasonable expectations on behalf of the offending party, which cannot be attained.

Reconciliation is more complicated than forgiveness because it involves at least two parties who are partial to their own sin. The greatest hindrances to reconciliation are a lack of honesty, humility, and transparency.

While certain relationships cannot (nor should) be reconciled, God holds the marriage covenant as the metaphor of Christ with His church (Ephesians 5). He also commands us to be reconciled with one another (disciple among disciple). In the context of the marriage covenant and visible church, we are to forgive one another, as God in Christ has forgiven us, and be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit (Eph. 4:3-6) through reconciliation.