

## Forgiveness: Why Did Jesus Emphasize This More Than Anyone, Ever?

Various passages including The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:23-35)

After skipping a week, today we resume our series “Jesus for Skeptics, Beginners, and Strugglers,” by examining Jesus’ remarkable teaching on forgiveness.

### Beginners

- Two things Jesus did *not* talk about concerning forgiveness (but Americans frequently do):
  1. “I know God forgives me, but the biggest challenge is *forgiving myself*.”
  2. Forgiving others is important because it’s good for *you*, for your physical and emotional health, as well as personal autonomy.

### The Incredible History of Forgiveness

- The Old Testament has little to say about us forgiving others (!?)
  - *The Law*. Where is “Forgive your neighbor”? (Hint: it’s not there.)
  - *Wisdom*. The depth and wisdom of loving forgiveness: “Whoever covers an offense seeks love.” (Prov 17:9; see also 10:12 and 15:1)
  - *But God forgiving people is all over the Old Testament*, on various occasions, and through The Law’s sacrificial system. (ex. Num 14:19-20).
- Jesus has four startling teachings on forgiveness:
  - He **declares** forgiveness on various occasions (Mark 2:5, Matthew 9:2, Luke 7:48, etc.)
  - He **commands** forgiveness—what the OT did not do (Matthew 18:15, 21-35, etc.)

- He **associates** our forgiveness with our act of forgiving others. (Matt 18:35; 6:12-15; Mark 11:25; Luke 6:37, 17:3)
  - “Jesus is telling us that the ability we have for receiving forgiveness and the ability we have for granting forgiveness are one and the same thing. If we open the one we shall open the other.”
- He **guarantees** forgiveness in his death (Matt 26:28; coming up in two weeks)

### Skeptics

- A popular 21<sup>st</sup> century (post-9/11) objection against “religion” in general: its tie to *violence*
  - But this overlooks Jesus’ non-violent teachings and non-violent death

### Strugglers

- But how can I forgive?

### Questions for reflection and application:

- 1) What were Jesus’ teachings on forgiveness? Read in particular Matthew 6:12-15, 18:21-35, 26:28.
- 2) Why does Jesus connect so closely our ability to *receive* forgiveness from God with our ability to *give* forgiveness to others? How can this be true?
- 3) Now the tough application:
  - a. Spend some time in prayer asking God to reveal who you need to forgive, a person you need to take a step toward (see Matthew 18:15).
  - b. Make a plan to do this. If you’re not sure the person actually wronged you, start the conversation by saying, “Help me understand why you...”
  - c. Tell someone your plan, and ask them to keep you accountable.
  - d. Carry out your plan, and tell your accountability person how it went!