



As a sequel to the study 'Forgiveness - basic principles 1'¹, concerning the relationship between God and man, this study develops the basic principles of forgiveness further.

Basic principle 2: A disciple with himself.

God accepts the fact that man is not perfect in holiness.

Through faith in the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, when someone is converted and becomes His disciple, God wipes the sponge over the sins of the past, which were 'committed in ignorance'. Even if the disciple behaves incorrectly or wrongly afterwards, Jesus is ready to grant him His forgiveness, for:

- *Therefore, there is now **no condemnation** for those who are **in Christ Jesus**, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:1-2)*

God does not condemn a disciple of Jesus Christ who behaves wrongly, as explained in the studies 'The law and the curse'² and 'Flesh and Spirit, curse and grace'³.

If a disciple of Jesus Christ is not condemned by God, **a disciple may live in freedom and absolve himself from every condemnation.**

A disciple of Jesus Christ may forgive himself for the fact that:

- he is perhaps still struggling with his past or his upbringing
- or he is struggling to be like Jesus in his character
- he perhaps **feels** condemned by other people
- or he feels that he comes short when serving God and his neighbour.

Nevertheless, it is good for a disciple himself to recognise what has gone wrong, or where he reacted badly, without condemning himself, so that he can then examine how to avoid doing so again.

A disciple of Jesus Christ may also realise that, in this life, he is on the way to perfection – a state he will not achieve on earth.

James expresses this as follows:

- *But whoever looks intently into the **perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it**—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do. (James 1:25)*

Basic principle 3: a disciple and his neighbour.

Just as God does not condemn someone who stumbles, but seeks a way to restore the relationship, the attitude of a disciple of Jesus Christ in relationship to his neighbour should be likewise.

This is illustrated beautifully in Matthew 18, where Peter asks Jesus:

1 Study: Forgiveness – basic principles 1.

2 Study: The law and the curse.

3 Study: Flesh and Spirit, curse and grace.



- *Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times? (Matthew 18:21)*

a. Peter as an example for a disciple.

Peter could have become angry when his brother (illustration of the neighbour) wronged him. Understandable perhaps, but just as God accepts the fact that people make mistakes, a disciple of Jesus Christ will also have to accept the fact that people make mistakes.

And if he becomes angry, he will have to learn how to manage his anger and call a halt to it, in order not to succumb to it himself, as Paul writes:

- *In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry ... (Ephesians 4:26)*

This may not always succeed right away, perhaps, but remember that Jesus helps in this situation too.

- *When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. **Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.** (1 Peter 2:23)*

A disciple has received complete forgiveness in the blood of Jesus Christ and **this blood is also sufficient** to forgive his neighbour. This is the reason for the appeal:

- *To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. (1 Peter 2:21)*
- *All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and **gave us the ministry of reconciliation**: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, **not counting people's sins against them.** And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:18-19)*

Realise that:

- *... He (Jesus) is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:2)*

God forgives the disciple who sins against Him (or His teaching), although this does not mean that he should continue to sin.

This forgiveness is truly received through faith in the blood of Jesus Christ, so that reconciliation is brought about between a disciple of Jesus Christ and God the Father.⁴

A disciple must therefore not then stand in the way of possible reconciliation because of his attitude towards his neighbour who does something wrong.

By looking at one's own imperfection and accepting that no one is perfect and stumbles (sins), he/she will be able **to let go** of the **condemnation** and the **guilt** it causes (forgive).

This is the condition upon which reconciliation in the relationship can be brought about.

b. The brother as an example of a neighbour:

The brother (the neighbour) may have sinned against Peter (a disciple) through an angry remark; dishonesty, loss of borrowed property, throwing borrowed money away, condemnatory or hostile behaviour or so many other reasons, as a result of which traumatic hurts can arise.

⁴ Study: The priest in the order of Melchizedek.



Because the neighbour damages the image of God in him by this wrong attitude, he must first of all give account of himself to God.

And even though God forgives, this does not mean that the neighbour does not remain guilty towards the person against whom he has sinned.

This cannot be settled simply by asking: Will you forgive me?

Just as he must acknowledge to God what has gone wrong in order to receive forgiveness in Christ and thus to restore the relationship with Him, he will also have to admit and confess that he has acted wrongly to the person who was sinned against.

He must realise that he has possibly hurt the other person deeply.

He will also have to ascertain whether he has maybe caused material damage and reach an agreement to compensate for this.

This is the only way in which true reconciliation can take place in a broken relationship, given that the injured party, like God, is already prepared to forgive.

Extra:

It is good to reflect upon the fact that anyone who ignores God's teaching and harms someone else's life as a result, also harms his own life in many cases.

Remarks:

- It is highly possible for someone to **react wrongly** to something that someone else did not intend to be hostile. In that case he/she who reacts wrongly will have to examine him/herself to ascertain whether he/she should perhaps confess the wrong reaction to the other person.
- Even if a disciple who has been wronged lets go of what happened in the past, that does not mean that the other person should not undertake an action to avoid a repeat in the future.
- The fact that a an injured disciple is prepared to forgive does not exclude the possibility of the person who has done wrong being called to account by official authorities.

Illustration of the basic principles.

Jesus illustrated these basic principles of forgiveness in a parable.

- *Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold[s] was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.*
- *"At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.'*
- *The servant's master **took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.***
(Matthew 18:23-27)

The master does not complain about the fact that his slave has wasted away his fortune. He does not tell his slave off and he does not condemn him because he has been incompetent when dealing with money.



He **accepts** the slave's incompetence.

The master takes pity on him and even **absolves** him from the **debt**.

He requires no repayment and accepts the fact that the slave has squandered his capital, for an amount equal to more than 200,000 annual salaries of a day-labourer.

This is what Jesus meant when he told Peter (a disciple) that he should **always** forgive his brother (the neighbour).

Basic principle 4: Freedom through 'forgiveness'.

Because the master accepts the loss of his fortune, he sets both himself and his slave free.

a. Freedom for the creditor.

If the master had maintained the demand to repay, he could have been frustrated for the rest of his life because of the loss of his fortune.

This would have had an effect upon his manner of interaction with people in general and with his slave in particular.

By **accepting** the fact that the slave had wronged him and **by forgiving/absolving him from his debt as well**, the master is no longer focussed upon an impossible demand.

As a result, he is able to look at the present and the future candidly and without frustrations.

General remark:

A disciple who has been hurt in life helps himself best by accepting what has happened in the past. It is impossible to change that.

This is not always easy, but those who continue to live in the past will possibly take on the role of victims, as a result of which looking towards a new future is blocked.

It is very encouraging, in this respect, to know that Jesus Christ is always ready to support us when we are processing and learning to live with the consequences of the hurt of the past and restoring emotions.

b. Freedom for the victim.

The slave is set free because the master drops the demand for repayment.

He is **rescued from an enormous debt**, which would otherwise burden him for the rest of his life.

There is therefore no longer anything preventing the slave from building up a good relationship with his master once again, free from anxiety, in a life based on gratitude, whereby he will not treat what happened in the past lightly.

Basic principle 5: Forgiveness must be received.

When the master called the slave to account, the slave threw himself down like a suppliant and said:

- *Be patient with me, and I will pay back everything. (Matthew 18:26)*

He thus committed himself to an impossible assignment.

He was so obsessed with paying back that he did not understand that his master had forgiven him the enormous debt, and:



- *But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. 'His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.' But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. (Matthew 18:28-30)*

The slave is convinced that, if the master will only give him enough time, he will be able to pay back the enormous debt. It has **not got through to him** that this is impossible and that the master has freed him from his enormous debt.

Later, when he meets a fellow slave who still owes him an amount, he acts according to his own conviction (maybe frustration in fact) 'I have to pay back, you will also pay me back'.

He does not realise that because his debt has been forgiven, he himself should also forgive his fellow slave's debt.

General remarks:

A disciple who does not fully realise that God has completely forgiven him through faith in Jesus Christ will find it very difficult to completely forgive his neighbour.

Anyone who **does not accept** forgiveness in Jesus Christ or remains indifferent to it, does not live free from divine condemnation. As a result, he will continue to hold the neighbour's faults against him.

- Living on the basis of forgiveness by grace⁵, God's kindness does not mean that a disciple no longer has to give **account** to God and the neighbour for the way in which he lives his life.
- Neither does this mean that his faults may not be pointed out to him.
A disciple who accepts the fact that he has been completely forgiven by God no longer needs **to feel** accused if a remark is made against him, even if this is intended to condemn him.
He can **give consideration** to that remark, however, in order to adjust his life if necessary.

Basic principle 6: Lack of clemency leads to death.

How the slave acts towards his fellow slave does not remain unnoticed:

- *When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. 'Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I **cancelled** all that debt of yours because you begged me to. **Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?***
- *In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. (Matthew 18:31-34)*

The slave who does not forgive his fellow slave's debt ends up being handed over to the jailers to be tortured until he has paid his master all the money he owes him.

That means for ever, eternally, because he will never be able to repay his debt.

⁵ Study: Grace - definition.



Jesus warns that it is possible for a disciple to meet the same fate:

- *This is how my heavenly Father **will treat** each of you **unless** you forgive your brother or sister **from your heart**. (Matthew 18:35)*

This means that a disciple who has accepted forgiveness in the blood of Jesus Christ has made that forgiveness his **own**.

For what one experiences in one's heart (the soul), is what is going to belong to one's character. Forgiving from the heart is only possible through faith in Christ Jesus and by **remaining in Him** in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Through lack of clemency a disciple of Jesus Christ also risks remaining excluded from forgiveness for his own transgressions.⁶

Think too of the texts:

- *... And forgive us our debts, **as we also** have forgiven our debtors. (Matthew 6:12)*
- *... For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. (Matthew 7:2)*

What these basic principles teach us.

a. A disciple of Jesus Christ may live in freedom, on the basis of the forgiveness he receives from God, from Jesus Christ and from himself.

b. As Jesus teaches in the parable, a disciple will not only forgive/let go of the neighbour's wrong behaviour **in advance**, but he will also forgive/let go of the **debt** or the hurt which that behaviour has caused him.

He may need to seek professional help in this respect, however.

But this is the only way both parties can become **free** of condemnation and guilt, and for the way to be able to be opened towards possible reconciliation.

This does not absolve anybody from his/her own responsibility for his/her behaviour towards others.

c. A relationship can only be restored if the guilty party shows **remorse** for the damage he has caused and also **confesses** the fact, first of all to God and then to his neighbour.

d. When sin and guilt are let go of, **freedom** springs to life in one's own heart, as well as the possibility of an open relationship between both parties.

e. Lack of clemency, revenge and bitterness can cause **physical disorders**.

In the worst event the disciple risks **forfeiting** his **eternal redemption** as a result.

f. Guilt and forgiveness should **not** be treated **lightly**. This is true both for the person who receives forgiveness, and for the person who forgives.

⁶ Study: The law and the curse.