



To forgive is the translation of the Greek word **'aphiemi'**.

Its correct meaning is explained in 'Forgiving – word study'¹.

In that study it is made clear that **'aphiemi'** is a **general expression** and usually indicates that someone:

- lets go of **something** (an event or a statement)
- whereby **people** are set free. (the person who is 'forgiven' and/or the person who 'forgives')

What **forgiving** means in practice is explained in this study.

The focus here is on the **concept** of 'forgiving'. Therefore little attention is paid to the feelings in the relationships between people, which can play an important role in this context.

There are four discernible areas in which forgiving plays a role:

- man in relationship to God
- God in relationship to man
- a person in relationship to himself
- people in relationship to each other

Man in relationship to God.

Some people need to forgive God!?

This sounds strange against the thought that forgiving has to do with sin and guilt.

God is perfect and cannot sin, for He is light. Why would anyone have to forgive Him therefore?

There are nevertheless people who find that God makes mistakes. They are angry with Him and reproach Him for events in their personal life, in the lives of other people or in the world.

That anger stands in the way of their relationship with Him. They are suspicious as far as He, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are concerned, because they do not fulfil expectations.

For these people it is important to 'forgive' **Gods acts**, to **let go of** their **judgement** of Him.

- God is sovereign and cannot be called to account by people
- no one is capable of fathoming God's acts
- He will never anyone who seeks Him in the lurch, however
- God is also righteous and leaves a person free as far as his personal responsibility for his own decisions is concerned.

God in relationship to man.

Jesus wrought complete forgiveness of sins through His death on the cross.

In doing so:

- ***He 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)

a. An atonement for the sins of the whole world.

Paul writes:

¹ Study: Forgiving – word study.



- ... 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 5:19)

God's desire was for society to be perfect, and He therefore provided a service of sacrifice for forgiveness of sins, or the removal of the sinner from society by means of capital punishment.

The death of Jesus has wrought complete forgiveness of sins, for every person in the whole world. God has reconciled Himself to the world, by **giving everyone the opportunity** to receive forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ.

This does not mean that everyone is saved automatically, however.

b. Atonement through faith.

Only by faith in Jesus Christ is anyone **freed** from **transgressions**.

The sins are 'let go', removed from him, as Peter writes that Jesus

- *He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed. (1 Peter 2:24)²*

When, through faith/trust in Jesus Christ, sins are removed from a believer, He then places the believer before Himself,

- ... without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. (Ephesians 5:27)

Remark:

When the **forgiveness** of sins is referred to, the deeper meaning is always: **letting go of, or being made loose from the sins**.

The sin sacrifice, which the high priest offered during the Great Day of Atonement³, whereby the sins were laid on a billy goat, which was brought to the desert, to die there, illustrates this splendidly.

A person is set free by God through faith in Jesus Christ, because he is **set free** from **his sins**. The **sins** are **removed** from him.

Like the slave in the parable in Matthew 18:23-35 was **set free**, because the pressure of the debt amounting to 10,000 talents was removed from him.

Isaiah prophesied:

- *But your iniquities have **separated** you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. (Isaiah 59:2)*

Forgiveness of sins, through faith in Jesus Christ, removes this separation, because the sins of the believer are removed.

Forgiveness is not the final goal in this context, but rather the **door** that gives access to **a life in relationship with God**, the Father, for people who have become a new creation during their lifetime.⁴

² Study: Discipleship (1).

³ Study: The Great Day of Atonement.

⁴ Study: Flesh and Spirit, curse and grace.



The purpose of forgiveness is that whoever is freed by Jesus Christ in this way, goes on thankfully to live as His disciple **in an intimate relationship with Him**.

Through following Jesus Christ the disciple is loosed from the desire to sin, because the love of God is poured out in his heart, by the Holy Spirit.⁵

Someone in relationship to himself.

Anyone who realises that he/she has been absolved of all guilt, however great that may be, through faith in Jesus Christ, must not continue to accuse him/herself.

Whoever 'consecrates himself and does his very best', to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ⁶, is completely accepted by Him and may become free by forgiving himself.

God judges in a completely righteous manner.

- He knows that people live and act as a result of their past: origin, education, choices and events.
- He knows that no one can live without sinning, but will stumble regularly, even as a disciple of Jesus Christ.
- He knows that everyone can fall, however good his intentions may be.

If God wants to go further with someone, in spite of his failures, and sets him/her free, he/she may not condemn him/herself, but go on to live in that freedom.

Paul takes that freedom as well, when he says:

- *I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, ... (1 Corinthians 4:3-4)*

This is not a licence for a life without God's law, of course, for he says:

- *... but that does not make me innocent. (1 Corinthians 4:4)*

Paul leaves the judgement of his life to Jesus Christ, who judges righteously, when he says:

- *It is the Lord who judges me. (1 Corinthians 4:4)*

This does not discharge anyone from his responsibilities in relationship to other people, of course.

People in relationship to each other.

There are three areas of importance as far as the relationship of people to each other is concerned:

- Allowing others' personal responsibility.
- Allowing others' responsibility even when I am disadvantaged.
- Forgiving others who have consciously done me wrong.

⁵ Study: Discipleship (2).

⁶ Study: The law and the curse.



1. Allowing the other person's personal responsibility.

People often pronounce judgement on others, even though it is no concern of theirs, or they criticise people because they do things differently to what they themselves are used to.

Jesus was invited to a friend's house and, during the meal,

- *... a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. (Mark 14:3)*

Some of those who were at the table were indignant at this waste (with a value of approximately 15 months' salary) and judged that it would have been better to have sold the myrrh and to give the proceeds thereof to the poor.

But Jesus said:

- *"Leave her alone (aphiemi)," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? (Mark 14:6)*

This could also have been translated as follows: **Forgive her; why are you bothering her?**

The woman performed a deed for Jesus. She was not accountable to anyone with regard to what she did with her personal property. The only person who could have made a remark about this was Jesus, because the woman performed a deed for Him.

Paul expresses this as follows:

- *Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand. (Romans 14:4)*

Everyone must let others, with whom he has no relationship of authority, assume their own personal responsibility and 'forgive' others' acts, 'let go of' others' acts. In this way their relationship will not be disrupted by condemnation.

2. Let others assume their responsibility even if I am disadvantaged.

This can have two aspects:

- Another person does wrong by accident.
- Another person carries out an order.

Another person does wrong by accident.

It can happen that someone disadvantages someone else unintentionally.

Everyone does wrong by accident from time to time.

Somebody can cause hurt by an unthinking statement, or by an act as a result of which someone else suffers damage, even if it was only a stain on someone's clothing by knocking a cup of coffee over.

Jesus teaches in the 'Lord's Prayer':

- *And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. (Matthew 6:12)*

The disadvantaged person should 'let go of/forgive' the other person in every situation, thus keeping the relationship free from condemnation.



For the 'guilty party' to ask for forgiveness does not make much sense therefore, but it is very important, of course, that he/she realises what has been caused, expresses sincere regret (is repentant) and assumes his responsibility as far as the possible damage is concerned.

Another person carries out an order.

Someone can feel disadvantaged by someone else who is simply exercising his profession and acting in accordance with his responsibility, such as a police officer, for example, who writes out a fine for incorrect parking.

The officer is simply doing his job and it is wrong to scold him for that.

'Forgive' **the remark** that the department head makes about a task that has not been carried out correctly. Accept his comment and try to do the work better in future, without grudge or bitterness.

The most extreme situation is to be found in Jesus' case, when He is crucified.

When the soldiers hammer the nails through His wrists and feet, He obviously experiences in His Spirit that His Father can no longer look at this and wants to intervene.

Then Jesus said, maybe calling this out in His pain:

- *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34)*

In other words:

- *Father, let go of the soldiers, let them carry on, forgive them for doing so. They are only carrying out an order.*

3. Forgiving someone who has wronged me.

Peter approached Jesus with the question:

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

Jesus answered:

- *I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. (Matthew 18:22)*

The number 7 is the number of the fullness of God in the Bible.

Think, among other things, of creation in seven days, seven days trekking round Jericho and seven times on the last day, the Feast of Tabernacles that lasted seven days, 7x7 for the year of jubilee.

When Peter asks 'up to seven times', that is more than enough according to his way of thinking.

Jesus answers however: 10 x 7 x 7. (10 is the number of completeness)

In other words: **Always**.

Anyone who realises that Jesus is always ready to forgive must also be ready to forgive others himself.

This is extremely important, for:

- *With the measure you use, it will be measured to you - and even more. (Mark 4:24)*



Jesus warns:

- ***For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.***
(Matthew 6:14-15)

A disciple of Jesus Christ must always be ready 'to let go of' others' faults, so that the relationship with those persons remains open and it is possible to make repairs.

The question: "Will you forgive me", is also unnecessary in this context.

Thinking about what Jesus says, the answer of a disciple of Jesus Christ can only be "Yes", therefore.

When someone has consciously or unconsciously caused damage to someone else, he must not ask for forgiveness, but show true repentance and realise what he/she has caused.

Only then is the way free to keep the relationship open between them both, or to repair it.

See also the studies: Forgiveness – basic principles 1 and 2.⁷

⁷ Study: Forgiveness – basic principles 1 and 2.