
How Will Being Forgiven Change Me?

Jesus taught his followers to forgive. When we know we can't escape punishment for some wrong we've done forgiveness seems pretty attractive. But being forgiven changes a lot of other things in addition to avoiding punishment. How does our sense of identity change when we are forgiven? And, how does being forgiven by Jesus change the way we forgive other people?

Many definitions for forgiveness exist, but we will focus on the teaching of Christ and the New Testament.

Our Identity: Forgiven

In the prayer Jesus taught his disciples, often known as the Lord's Prayer, Jesus makes a statement about how forgiveness works. It's found in that part of the prayer that can be said two different ways: "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors" or "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus is quoted as going on to say, *"For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."*¹

Our Identity: Forgiven Plus

Receiving Jesus' gift of forgiveness and salvation changes your identity². You are no longer a sinner, deserving of Hell, and eternal damnation. You are now forgiven by the blood of Jesus Christ³. You don't deserve to be forgiven, but God forgives you because Jesus earned this salvation and gave it to you⁴. So, when God the Father looks at you He sees no sin. He sees only what Jesus has done. It is truly a wonderful thing to know you are forgiven by God, but the gift of salvation is much bigger than that.

Not only are you forgiven, but you now possess a wealth of God's blessings originally belonging to Jesus Christ⁵. The Bible says we are "co-heirs" with Jesus Christ. So, we will reign with Him⁶. We will live in His house⁷. We will be members of His family and household⁸. That's so amazing that none of us can really wrap our minds around the concept. Exactly what it means only eternity will reveal. What is clear is that it will be glorious and wonderful beyond anything our imaginations can comprehend.

You might think this only describes how we will be after Jesus Christ returns and comes into His Kingdom. The scripture is clear, though, that those who are in Christ are currently seated in the Heavenly realms⁹. That's not in the future, that is in the present moment. Our identity is not only going to be changed, it has already changed.

¹ Matthew 6:14&15; Luke 11:1-4

² When we are in Christ we become a "new man" who is "created in righteousness" (Ephesians 4:25). Paul explains that as a Christian he no longer lives but Christ lives in him (Galatians 2:20). Christians are "made new" (2Corinthians 5:17). Those who are in Christ are instructed to "put on the new man" (Ephesians 4:29).

³ We have "redemption through His blood" (Ephesians 1:7 and Colossians 1:14). Again, we are changed by "the blood" of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:13) that was shed on the cross.

⁴ When Abraham believed and trusted in God it was "reckoned as righteousness" (Galatians 3:6). This means that his faith, and not anything he did, was considered to be the reason God would judge Abraham as being righteous.

⁵ Those in Christ are called "joint heirs with Christ" who will share both His suffering here on earth and His "glory" in heaven (Romans 8:17).

⁶ If we suffer, sharing in the rejection of Christ, we will also "reign with Him" (2Timothy 2:12).

⁷ Like a bridegroom preparing a wedding chamber for his bride, Jesus has returned to His father's home, and He is preparing a place for us, and He will return to bring us to live with Him there (John 14:1&2).

⁸ We may have been born with now special privileges or rights, but we now are members of "the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19).

⁹ Paul says that those who are in Christ have been raised up with Christ, and that He has "made us sit together heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6). Think of a wedding reception where there are name tags where you sit. Not only is there a place setting for you in heaven, with your name on it, but a some spiritual sense you are already seated there.

“Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures ... he was buried ... and he rose again, according to the scriptures (1Corinthians 15:3b&4). When we put our faith and trust in His death on the cross as the payment for our sins, accepted by God, then we are judged as having been made right before God (Romans 4:24-25). This connection to Christ’s salvation is by faith and not by works (Romans 4:6; 11:6; Galatians 2:16). So, even though we can’t do anything to change our relationship with God by our own efforts, Christ did it for us. Christ’s death on the cross transfers His righteousness onto all who believe in Him as Savior (Romans 4:23). We can rest assured that Jesus has done everything needed to make us right with God. Nothing more can be done to make us right with God because Jesus had already done everything for us.

Those who receive forgiveness from Jesus Christ will receive blessings that will last for all of eternity. Think about the parable about the father who had great love for his two sons¹⁰. Accepting the Father’s love is the key. Instead of being driven away from doing what is wrong by fear of punishment, those in Christ are drawn to do what is right and good because of the love the Heavenly Father has shown to them. They want to show this love to others because the love in their hearts is overflowing.

Jonathan Haslett

Two Stories of Forgiveness

Jesus told two parables that teach us a lot about what it means to both receive forgiveness and grant forgiveness.

The first parable is about a wealthy man had two sons. The younger son, asked that he might receive half of the father’s wealth. Two things are irregular about this request: (1) The older son usually received a double portion so the younger son would have normally received only half, and (2) No one usually receives their inheritance until the person leaving the inheritance dies.

Surprisingly, the father grants the request of the younger son. The younger son has some wild, party days until the money runs out. He then hires himself out as a servant who feeds pigs (something that would very disgusting to a Jewish person). The son comes to his senses, and decides to ask for his father’s forgiveness. He plans his speech, explaining what a bad son he has been, and asking that his father hire him on as a servant.

Before he even gets very close to his father’s house, the father sees him, and runs out to him. That father gives him a set of new clothes that define him as a person of wealth and importance. Then he throws a big party.

The older son, returning home, hears the party sounds. He refuses to go in and join. The father then comes out to him, he says: “Your brother was dead and is alive again.” We don’t know whether or not the older son’s resentment keeps him from joining the party.¹¹

The point is that the Father forgives both of his sons. The younger son sought short-term pleasure. The older son, however, thought he was perfect because he never rebelled. His attitude, however, was resentful because he felt he deserved more than the father gave him. Furthermore, we’re not sure if the older son was willing to forgive his younger brother, or be able to accept the fact that the father forgave his brother. The Father is like God, who forgives us even though we don’t deserve it. The question remains, though, will we accept the full terms of the Father’s forgiveness or not?

A second parable is about a man who owed an impossibly large amount of money to the king and the king forgave his debt. Later the same day the same servant of the king threw someone else into prison for owing him an incredibly small debt. When the king heard about his servant’s lack of forgiveness he was furious with the unforgiving servant. Why? Jesus says that a person who receives forgiveness for a huge debt should pass forward the same attitude of forgiveness to everyone else. And, the flip side of that is that if you don’t pass forgiveness then you can’t keep the forgiveness originally offered to you. So, if you wish to receive Christ’s forgiveness, you must grant forgiveness to others.¹²

¹⁰ Luke 15:11-23

¹¹ Luke 15:11-23

¹² Matthew 18:23-35