

# When Should We Forgive?

Rick Railston  
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Today we're going to talk about one of the most important subjects in these end times, especially as we look forward to the Passover which is just a little more than two months away. It's amazing how time flies. The subject is forgiveness. The reason we're going to talk about it today is because there is a great misconception about that subject among some of God's people, and it could be salvational if one has a misperception about the subject of forgiveness.

We all know that we should forgive. With that in mind, let's go to Matthew 18. Place a marker here because we will come back to this. You're going to need two markers today actually.

**Matthew 18:21.** *Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? (KJV)*

The Expositor's Bible Commentary says this:

Rabbinical writings comment that a brother might be forgiven a repeated sin three times, but on the fourth there was to be no forgiveness. Peter, thinking himself to be big hearted, volunteers seven times.

Maybe he was trying to impress Christ a little bit.

*22) Jesus said unto him, I say not unto you, until seven times: but, until seventy times seven. (KJV)*

The clear implication is that it is an infinite number. The Greek word for "forgive" is Strong's 863. Listen carefully to the meaning because if we don't understand the meaning, we can't understand the subject. It means to *forsake, to lay aside, to leave, to let alone, or to send away*. Just walk away from it. Let it alone. Yet, given what we just read here, forgiving others is a very difficult thing to do as we all know.

Let's say if someone slanders you or spreads lies about you, it is hard to forgive. I've been on the receiving end of that. Been there ... done that. I know how hard it is to forgive.

It's easy for people to hold onto offenses, not to let them alone or lay them aside. Then other people (I'm talking in God's church now) put conditions on whether or not they will forgive. Let's turn to Luke 17, because some people quote this as a reason not to forgive. If you have a marker, let's place it here. We're going to read Christ's words in verse 3. Read this carefully.

**Luke 17:3.** *Take heed to yourselves: If your brother trespass against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. (KJV)*

It says, if he repents. I heard a woman in the church say, a number of years ago, “He must come to me on his knees before I will forgive him,” She was referencing Luke 17:3. I heard a minister refer to this verse saying, “You do not have to forgive someone until they come and apologize to you to your face.” I heard that with my own ears.

In Matthew 18, one verse says one thing, saying we should forgive an infinite number of times. Then Luke 17:3, when taken out of context, can be an excuse not to forgive.

How do we reconcile these two scriptures? How do we do that? Are we to forgive only under certain circumstances, or are we always to forgive all the time? It’s a huge question, because the answer to that question could be critical to our salvation. There is no more appropriate subject than forgiveness as we approach the Passover.

The title of the sermon is:

### When Should We Forgive?

First, we will set a scriptural background for this subject. We will look at six areas, and then with the seventh area, we will compare these two scriptures directly and answer the question.

#### **First point: When we sin, we sin against God.**

In setting the background, we must understand that when we sin, we sin against God. We know that sin is the transgression of the law.

**1 John 3:4.** *Whosoever commits sin transgresses also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. (KJV)*

We also have to understand that God wrote the law. The law came from God. He is the lawgiver. Let’s turn to James 4:12 to prove that point. It says it clearly. This is under the point of when we sin, we sin against God.

**James 4:12.** *There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy ...*

If you read the context, the context is God. However, for time, we won’t do that. So when we sin, we sin against the one who gave the law. Therefore, when we sin, we sin against God. That’s why David said what he did in Psalm 51. David was very clear when he was repenting of the horrible series of sins he committed in the incident with Bathsheba, there is only one being that he sinned against.

**Psalm 51:4.** *Against you, you only, have I sinned, and done this evil in your sight ... (KJV)*

When we sin, we sin against the lawgiver. We sin against God. It follows then that when we sin, only God can forgive our sins, since He is the lawgiver. He is the one we sin against, thereby wiping away the penalty for our sins.

**Romans 6:23.** *For the wages of sin is death ... (KJV)*

When we go to God and acknowledge and repent of our sin, only He can wipe away that penalty. We understand and we memorialize this as we keep the spring holy days. Forgiveness is made possible by the blood of Jesus Christ. As a reminder of that, let's go to Colossians 1:13-14. I'll read this from the New King James. So the point is that when we sin, we sin against God and only He can forgive those sins and wipe away the penalty and that is made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

**Colossians 1:13.** *He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, 14) in whom we have redemption through His blood ... (NKJV)*

What is the definition of redemption?

14b) ... *the forgiveness of sins. (NKJV)*

Christ's blood makes it possible to have our sins forgiven. So the first point is that when we sin, we sin against God.

**Second point: Before God will forgive us, we must repent.**

I know you know this, but we need to set the background to answer the question at hand.

Let's read a principle for all time. This is in the Old Testament in 2 Chronicles 7. It's one of my favorite scriptures. Yes, it is a principle directed at Ancient Israel, but it is a principle for all time, for all people. It's a plea to Ancient Israel. Oh, that they had done so!

**2 Chronicles 7:14.** *If my people, which are called by my name [We're the body of Christ], shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways ... (KJV)*

That's a definition of repentance. Repentance means *to turn*.

14b) ... *then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. (KJV)*

What a promise! What a beautiful thing. As we know, Israel didn't have the heart, and they were not able to do that. But the concept is repeated in the New Testament. Let's turn to 1 John 1:9. This is establishing the principle that if we want to be forgiven, we have to repent. This is very clear.

**1 John 1:9.** *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (KJV)*

We have to confess and repent. We have to be sincerely broken up about our sins, and if we do that, God is faithful to forgive our sins and cleanse us. However, it is our responsibility to first identify our sins, and then repent of them. That's what we should be focusing on between now and the Passover.

Now the third point gets us closer to these two scriptures that we talked about.

**Third point: Despite the fact that we sin against God, we can sin against others and others can sin against us.**

We can be on the receiving end of other people's sins.

Go back to Matthew 18:21. We read it earlier, although I didn't emphasize it. We can be on the receiving end of other people's sins.

**Matthew 18:21.** *Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother [what?] sin against me ... (KJV)*

So we can sin against others. Others can sin against us.

Sin has far reaching consequences as we all know. God said in Exodus, chapter 20, talking about the second commandment:

**Exodus 20:5.** *... visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; (KJV)*

Today we would call it collateral damage.

Just think about an example; let's say children following in the sins of their parents. As an example, a family with an abusive husband. I can't tell you the number of times, where children grow up in that environment, and the sons abuse their wives when they get married. They have witnessed their fathers do it. They emulate their fathers. They think that's normal. That's the way a husband-wife relationship should be.

Then, sadly, we see daughters growing up to marry abusive men just like their father. You would think they would want to flee from that, but so often it happens. They marry someone just like their father. They are in an abusive relationship. Thus, the suffering

and damage goes on from generation to generation. That is what God was talking about in Exodus 20.

We have to understand that whether or not we forgive somebody that sins against us, it has no bearing on their relationship with God, because only God can forgive them and wipe away the death penalty. That has nothing to do with us. That is between them and God.

So there are two separate situations; whether we forgive, and then how God deals with them and whether they repent and God forgives them.

The point here is that we can sin against others and others can sin against us.

**Fourth point: We will be forgiven to the extent that we forgive others.**

That is a scary thought. God looks at us to see how we forgive and then He applies the same measure to us. Let's go to Mark 11. I'll read from the New King James. Christ is speaking. He is instructing them and saying, "When you pray, you should pay attention to this."

**Mark 11:25.** *"And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him ... (NKJV)*

There is not a lot of wiggle room there.

*25b) ... that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.*

*26) But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses. (NKJV)*

This is quite clear. It's a straight forward principle and yet it is amazing to me that despite these words, how many people refuse to forgive? They stubbornly refuse to forgive. Turn to Matthew, chapter 6. This is the outline of every day prayer, how we should pray to God. Isn't it interesting that one of the principle areas is forgiveness?

**Matthew 6:9.** *After this manner therefore pray you: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be your name.*

*12) And forgive us our debts, as [to the extent] we forgive our debtors.*

*14) For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:*

*15) But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (KJV)*

Christ said this on two separate occasions. It's the same principle. If we want to be forgiven, we must forgive. We must forgive all of those who sin against us, not a fraction, not most, but all who sin against us.

The beauty is, you see, is when we do that, God blesses us. Any time we obey God and follow Him, blessings result. When we forgive, healing occurs inside of us. It is freeing for us. It's like lifting a burden off of us.

I remember Ann Landers once said that if you can't forgive a person, if you can't get over it, it's like letting them live in your head rent free. It's just there and it just burns and burns. It's like continual heartburn. It just won't let go. Some people cannot let go. But when we forgive, a huge weight comes off of us. Remember the definition: *Put it away. Let it alone. Get rid of it.* A huge weight comes off our shoulders and frees us from a heavy burden. Remember the definition: *Lay it aside. Let it alone.*

So, we will be forgiven to the extent that we forgive others.

**Fifth point: We must follow in our Father's footsteps, meaning ready and willing to forgive.**

God is ready and willing to forgive. As we're going to see, Christ, when He walked this earth was ready to forgive, and we must have the same attitude.

Notice God's attitude toward forgiveness. He is eager to forgive. He is ready to forgive. Let's turn to Psalm 86 and read verse 5. If there was a man that ever walked the earth that understood the depth of God's forgiveness, it was David; he experienced that for all of us to learn. This is God's nature.

***Psalm 86:5.*** *For you, Lord, are good, [notice] and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon you. (KJV)*

We can call upon God in repentance. We can call upon God in sorrow and He is ready to forgive and full of mercy.

We obviously know that for those of us who have been called, we have to go to God in repentance. We must first repent, but the whole time He is eager and waiting on us to repent, and then He issues forgiveness. He is eager to forgive. He is always ready to forgive, and so should we. We should always be ready and eager to forgive when someone sins against us.

You see, forgiveness is a unilateral act of mercy. It only takes one to forgive. Let's turn to Luke 23 and we'll start in verse 32. This is under the point that we have to follow in God's and Christ's footsteps in this matter of forgiveness. Christ has been betrayed. He has been spit on and beaten and scourged.

***Luke 23:32.*** *And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death.*

*33) And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. (KJV)*

Notice Christ's attitude.

*34) Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots. (KJV)*

These were Roman soldiers who had just nailed His hands and feet. They were parting His garments and casting lots as to who would get them. They didn't know or understand who Christ was. They obviously didn't know what sin is. They didn't understand God's law, and they obviously haven't repented. Yet, what did Christ do? He quickly forgave them for what they had just done to Him. They caused Him excruciating pain and ultimately death. His attitude is amazing.

The point is, we have to follow in those footsteps. The fact is, like those Roman soldiers, most of the people who sin against us, if the truth be known, they don't understand what they're doing either. They have a blind spot, and just don't understand what they're doing. They might be deceived by Satan (talking about those in the church now). They might be provoked by Satan. They might not be as close to God in prayer and study and they've drifted away from God. Satan provokes them and, bam, we're on the receiving end of their sin or their wrath.

So when someone sins against us, we need to follow in Christ's footsteps, being ready and willing to forgive at all times, never ever holding a grudge.

Again, when we forgive, it has no bearing on whether God forgives and wipes away their sins. That's between them and God. However, it is our responsibility to forgive. We are commanded to forgive.

We read Mark 11:25 earlier.

***Mark 11:25.** And when ye stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone ... (KJV)*

Forgive them. There is no qualifier here. It only takes one to forgive.

**Sixth point: Being eager and able to forgive is a result of humility and meekness.**

If we don't have humility and meekness, we won't forgive. If we have a haughty or superior attitude, then it is easy to hold a grudge. When someone demands penance of a perceived transgression, they are putting themselves above the other person. When that lady says, "He's going to have to crawl to me on his knees before I forgive him," what is she doing? She is setting herself up here and the person who allegedly sinned against her is down there, and he must kneel in her awesome presence before she will forgive. You see, that's vanity and pride.

Remember the parable of the Pharisee and the publican in Luke 18. The Pharisee said, "God I thank You that I'm not like other people. Everybody else commits extortion, they're unjust, they commit adultery like this publican standing over there." He is setting himself above the publican. He says, "I fast twice a week and give tithes of everything I have." When someone sets themselves above somebody, then they become a judge and it's easier to hold a grudge. It's easier to focus on somebody's else's sins and ignore their own.

Remember the Sermon on the Mount? You know what Christ said. He said, "Why! You can behold the speck in your brother's eye, but you have a beam in your own. How can you do that? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take this little piece of sawdust from your eye.'" But he has a beam in his own eye. Christ said, "You hypocrite! You'd better first cast out the beam from your own eye, then you can see clearly to help your brother take the tiny speck from his eye." It's so easy to focus on the sins of others.

We dare not, we must not allow a perceived offense to turn into a grudge. If we don't forgive, it will brew and Satan is there stirring the pot and it gets bigger and bigger and all consuming.

God knew that even when He was instructing carnal Israel. Let's go to Leviticus 19. There is an interesting definition that brought a smile to my face when I studied this. This is advice for Israel. It's even more crucial for us, God's people, today.

***Leviticus 19:18.*** *You shall not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people ... (KJV)*

You can't bear any grudge against the children of your people.

*18b) ... but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD. (KJV)*

The Hebrew word for "grudge" here is Strong's 5201. Figuratively it means *grudge, to cherish anger*.

I have known people in God's church who love their anger. They love to get angry. It gives them meaning, it gets their energy level going. It gets their heart going. It gives them a reason to live. They cherish their anger, and they cultivate it. They feed it. They water and fertilize it, and it gets bigger and bigger over time. They cherish their anger. They love their anger.

God says you cannot do that. It will consume you if you do. I've seen brethren in the past who can't let go of a past offense, real or imagined. They just can't let it go. They allow anger, resentment and bitterness to get bigger and bigger until it is all consuming. When that happens, where is Satan? He is right in the middle. He is stirring that pot and stoking the heat under the pot so it gets bigger and hotter.



Dorothy's mom said something interesting a number of years ago before she died. She said, "Holding a grudge is like taking poison and hoping the other person dies." That is exactly true, because the grudge becomes poison mentally, spiritually and physically to ourselves and to our bodies.

Remember the meaning of forgive. It means to *lay aside, let alone, put away*. A grudge is just the opposite. It means to *cherish the anger, cultivate it, nurse it*. We can't do that.

We have to realize that we sin, each one of us. We all need God's mercy. We need His mercy because none of us is free of sin, unlike Jesus Christ. Most of us probably need more mercy than the other person that may have sinned against us.

If God has forgiven me of committing murder in my heart, and I think all of us have done it at one time or another, we have committed murder in our heart because we have been angry with our brother or sister. If God has forgiven us of that, shouldn't we forgive our brothers and sisters of a far less offense, or any offense?

The fact is that humility and meekness on our part, realizing who we are relative to God, who we are relative to our brothers and sisters, if we have the necessary humility and meekness, it is easier to let go. It's easier to just put it away and walk away from it and not let it bother us. Let God handle it. Let's turn to Romans 12:19. We have to get to this point. We must let God handle it. Put it into God's hands, because we can't fix it. We can forgive, and that's our job.

Paul says:

**Romans 12:19.** *Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: ... (KJV)*

Don't cherish your anger.

*19b) ... for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord. (KJV)*

God will get even, if you want to talk in terms of getting even. God is the ultimate one to do that. At the end of the day, all scores will be settled, everything will be taken care of. So if someone sins against us, we should look to God and let Him handle it. We should forgive. Humility and meekness are essential for us to be able to forgive.

Considering what God and Christ have done for us, who are we not to forgive, given how many times God has forgiven us? God and Christ have been long suffering and patient with us.

So the sixth point is that humility and meekness are essential for us to forgive.

**Seventh point: Here we compare the two scriptures that, on the surface, seem to conflict with one another.**

What is the answer? Before we give the answer, we have to review the rules for Bible study and understanding scripture. We will talk about three of them. These have been in the church for decades.

The first rule is that you cannot establish doctrine based on one scripture. Can't do it. You'll get into trouble if you try to make an entire doctrine from one scripture. Scripture cannot be broken.

***John 10:35.** If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; (KJV)*

The second rule is that you have to put all the scriptures together. They all have to agree. It is essential to understand this so that we can understand apparent contradictions in scripture. Isaiah says it twice for emphasis. God inspired Isaiah to write this.

***Isaiah 28:10.** For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept ... (KJV)*

He repeats it for emphasis. You have to build a logical train of thought backed by scriptures for each precept.

*10b) ... line upon line [one scripture builds on another], line upon line; here a little, and there a little: (KJV)*

This tells us that the answer to any subject we want to study is not all found in one place in the Bible. God could have done that. Instead of chapters as we know them today, He could have said, "Here is everything you need to know about faith, and here's everything you need to know about the Sabbath." God didn't do it that way, because He wants us to study the Bible and take precept upon precept, add line upon line and come to the truth motivated by His holy spirit in us.

The point is, in the second rule for Bible study, we have to put the scriptures together and all those scriptures must agree. If we come up with some theory based on only some of the scriptures, but not all the scriptures, our theory is wrong.

I heard a minister once say when he was looking at prophecy between a certain area in Revelation and Matthew 24; He said, "I know they don't agree, but one of these is a timeline and the other is not." We're getting on thin ice here. All the scriptures have to agree.

The third rule is that we must understand the context of each scripture.

You can't pull a scripture out of its context, because then it's easy to make it mean something else. We have to understand the context around the scripture.

With these three rules of Bible study, let's now go to our two scriptures. We'll start with Matthew 18:21.

**Matthew 18:21.** *Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?  
22) Jesus sad unto him, I say not unto you, until seven times: but, until seventy times seven. (KJV)*

Here there is no qualifier. He doesn't say, "But if ....." None of that here.

Now go to Luke 17:3. We'll read that again for emphasis. Christ is saying:

**Luke 17:3.** *Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.  
4) And if he trespasses against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turns again to you, saying, I repent; you shall forgive him. (KJV)*

Here we see a qualifier. One scripture says, *seventy times seven* (an infinite amount). The other scripture says, *if he repents, you can forgive*.

How do we reconcile these scriptures? How do we get at the truth?

On the surface, they appear to contradict each other. As I said earlier, some people use Luke 17:3 as an excuse for not forgiving. They say, "Well, they haven't come to me and said that they're sorry. They haven't come to me and repented, therefore, I don't have to forgive them."

Let's understand that both of these scriptures occur in the latter part of Christ's ministry. Therefore, they both contain deeper spiritual meaning than some of the earlier scriptures when He was just starting out and explaining this new way of thinking, like the Sermon on the Mount.

With that in mind, let's go back to Matthew 18 and look at the context, because this is crucial to understanding both scriptures. If we look at verses 11 through 14, it's talking about going after lost sheep, which shows God's love. Now notice verses 15 through 17. This tells us how to go to a brother who sins against you. Now we're getting closer to the subject.

**Matthew 18:15.** *Moreover if your brother shall trespass against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone ... (KJV)*

Don't tell everyone in the church but him, but tell him.

*15b) ... if he shall hear you, you have gained your brother. (KJV)*

There is reconciliation now.

*16) But if he will not hear you, then take with you one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.*

*17) And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it to the church: but if he neglects to hear the church, let him be unto you as a heathen man and a publican. (KJV)*

That was what was said right up to the point where Peter came in verse 21 and said:

*21) Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? (KJV)*

He's trying to be big hearted, knowing what the rabbis had said for decades, millennia.

*22) Jesus said unto him, I say not unto you, until seven times: but, until seventy times seven. (KJV)*

In verses 23 through 34, Christ amplifies the subject of forgiveness with the parable of the king's servant who was forgiven money that he owed, but he wouldn't forgive the man who owed him money.

*23) Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king ... (KJV)*

Christ is obviously talking about Himself.

*23b) ... which would take account of his servants.*

We know that day is coming.

*24) And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.*

Today, that would be millions of dollars.

*25) But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.*

*26) The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you all. (KJV)*

Notice the attitude of his lord and master.

*27) Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion ... (KJV)*

We know that is a characteristic of God's spirit, and a characteristic of the Father and the Son.

*27b) ... and loosed him ... (KJV)*

Remember the definition of "forgive" is to *let it go, let it alone, walk away.*

*27 continued) ... and forgave him the debt. (KJV)*

Now here comes the lesson.

*28) But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him a hundred pence ... (KJV)*

Today that would be about \$10.00 versus millions.

*28b) ... and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me what you owe.*

*29) And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay you all. (KJV)*

He said exactly the same thing that this man who was choking him, had just said to his lord. What a hypocrite.

*30) And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.*

*31) So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.*

*32) Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O you wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt, because you desired me ... (KJV)*

He said, "You desired me, you appealed to me, you asked and begged me."

*33) Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, even as I had pity on you? (KJV)*

That's the message. If we want to be forgiven, we have to forgive others. Look at what God has forgiven us, and we won't forgive someone else a little slight in comparison to what God has forgiven us? This is the context of Matthew 18. Christ is telling us that this should be our attitude.

*34) And his lord was angry, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. (KJV)*

Christ's message here is, shouldn't we have compassion on those who sin against us, as God and Christ do with us? Notice the conclusion from Christ in verse 35. This is the reason He gave the parable.

*35) So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if you [notice this] from your hearts forgive not everyone his brother their trespasses. (KJV)*

There is no qualifier here. There are no exceptions. We have to do it, not just superficially, but we must do it from our heart, from our innermost being. The message is that if we want to be forgiven, we must forgive, not grudgingly, not with grit teeth, but from the heart.

This is clear. The context is very clear. The parable is directly related to what we read. There is absolutely no fog here at all.

With that in mind, let's go to Luke 17. We will look at the context. Christ is setting the stage here.

***Luke 17:1.** Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come ... (KJV)*

Let's just stop there. He's putting us on notice. If we are Christians, there will be offenses. People are going to do and say things that can cause us to be offended. That's just human nature, both on the offending part and those being offended. He said, "Get used to it." Today we would say, "Deal with it." Then He goes on to caution:

*1b) ... but woe unto him, through whom they come! (KJV)*

This means that we have to watch ourselves. I've known people in God's church that just leave a trail of offenses. We've had to ask people not to attend because wherever they go, you see casualties behind them. People are hurt, bleeding, upset and offended because of this person's conduct. This is a warning: Woe unto you if you offend.

*2) It would be better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. (KJV)*

Of course, back then, the church was just starting so everybody was a "little one," but we need to pay careful attention to people just coming into the church, because they don't have the experience or the knowledge or the depth of conversion that we do. Most of us have been here for decades. In verse 3 we get to the subject. Understand the context.

*3) Take heed to yourselves: If your brother trespass against you, rebuke him ... (KJV)*

It says, "Rebuke him." That means you have to go face-to-face. They didn't have telephones, cell phones or email. To rebuke someone, you had to go face-to-face.

*3b) ... and if he repents, forgive him.*

*4) And if he trespasses against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to you ... (KJV)*

Person to person, eyeball to eyeball ...

*4b) ... saying, I repent; you shall forgive him. (KJV)*

The key point to understand here is that Luke 17 is talking about acknowledging forgiveness face-to-face, communicating between the one who has committed the offense versus the one on the receiving end. To understand this, in verse 3 it says to rebuke him face-to-face. In verse 4 it says "turn again to you" meaning face-to-face. That is the context. That is what this is talking about.

Let's have a thought experiment for a minute. Let's say that I was holding a grudge, and it was burning in me for maybe six months, a year, or five years. It's just building up over time. Someone had offended me and I just let it build and I never forgave. Then that individual suddenly, out of the blue, walks up to me and says, "You know, I did this and I'm sorry. I repent." Do you think as human beings, even with God's spirit that we could just turn the switch like that and stop years of a grudge and anger and bitterness and say, "Oh, I'm so glad and thankful!" It doesn't happen. We might say, "You have to get down on your knees and acknowledge every second that you have offended me." That would be our attitude if we haven't already forgiven that person in our heart. We wouldn't be able to immediately forgive if we were holding a grudge. It would be impossible. Human nature can't change that fast. Our attitudes can't change in one second. How can we immediately forgive someone who comes to us with a repentant attitude if we haven't already done it in our heart?

If they came up to us, and we had already forgiven them, it was done, we had put it away like the definition says, we had let it alone. If that person walks up and says, "You know, I am so sorry." It would be easy to say, "I'm so thankful you came. Of course, I forgive you. Not a problem. Give me a hug." That would be the result of someone who had already forgiven in their heart.

We must be ready always to forgive. In doing so, we rid ourselves of resentment, bitterness and anger. It's a blessing to us.

The message here is that if an individual personally sins against us, as Christ did on the cross, we are to immediately forgive without limit. Then when they come and acknowledge their sin, we've already forgiven them, so guess what? We welcome that repentance, and then reconciliation happens. Reconciliation takes two. If the offended person has already forgiven the one who did the offense, when the offender repents of it

face-to-face, then you both acknowledge (1) forgiveness, and (2) repentance and you then have reconciliation. It takes two.

Therefore, Luke 17 is in the context of a public acceptance of one's repentance to us after they have sinned against us and our public forgiveness to them face-to-face. I'm not saying necessarily in front of the whole church or dozens of witnesses, but certainly face-to-face.

However, for that to work, we must have already forgiven in our heart. That's what Matthew 18 is talking about.

Turn back to Matthew 18:35. This is the key. For this to occur, this public acceptance of repentance and public acknowledgement of forgiveness:

***Matthew 18:35.*** *So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if you from your hearts forgive not everyone his brother their trespasses. (KJV)*

Our job, when we are on the receiving end, is to forgive from our heart. "God, they don't know what they're doing. Satan's got a hold of him. This person has a blind spot. Just please forgive him." Then from that point, we hold no grudges. We must forgive from our hearts and then acknowledge that forgiveness when they come to us face-to-face.

In Luke 17, it's talking about two different subjects really. Luke 17 is talking about public forgiveness, public acceptance of one's repentance and saying to them, eyeball-to-eyeball, "I forgive you."

Matthew 18, and all of these other scriptures we've talked about, clearly say that we must forgive from our hearts immediately as Christ did.

Now let's conclude. Oscar Wilde was a wit, a playwright and an author. He was born in 1845, and died in 1900. He said the following about forgiveness: "Always forgive your enemies. Nothing annoys them so much."

That's probably true. It takes people by surprise. But the fact is, our motivation in forgiving should not be to annoy our enemies as much as we would like to sometimes. Rather our motivation to forgive is because, aren't all people who have ever lived God's children? Aren't all people on the face of the earth living now, God's children? Aren't all people in God's church, regardless of what corporation they belong to, aren't they God's children, and shouldn't we treat them accordingly?

Our motivation in forgiving should be as Christ did, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing." This should be because we love our brothers and sisters and we want them to be in God's kingdom. We don't want to be a stumbling block in that process. Satan will cause us to be a stumbling block in that process if we allow him to do so.



So, when should we forgive? We read it in Matthew 18:35. If we don't forgive from our hearts everyone who sins against us, we are in trouble. It's clear. There are no qualifiers or exceptions.

Forgiveness has enormous benefits for us. When we have a forgiving attitude for the one who sins against us, it lifts the burden from us. Then when we sin, God forgives us. It wipes the slate clean. We should follow that example and wipe the slate clean, even though they haven't publically acknowledged their sin, even though they haven't come on their knees as that woman wanted, we just wipe the slate clean. We have no grudge. We have no resentment. We have no bitterness. That frees us to have peace. When we forgive others who sin against us, it's a relief for our mind and heart because there are no grudges, no bitterness, no resentment bubbling up inside of us. It makes our life much more peaceful. We can be free from all of that.

Most importantly, when we immediately forgive, guess what God is going to do to us when we sin? We all sin and we're going to sin because we are humans. When we repent, God forgives us, because we do the same for our brothers and sisters.

The point is, our salvation may well depend upon whether or not we forgive, or the degree to which we forgive.

Let's do another thought experiment. Wouldn't it be a tragedy if we loved God with all our heart and loved our neighbor as ourselves, if we kept the Sabbath and the holy days, we tithe and supported those in need, but at the end of the day when Christ returned, we were not allowed into the kingdom because we would not forgive? Wouldn't that be a tragedy? We don't want to go there. We don't want to be in that category. That is why the Bible says what it says. Paul wrote this to the church at Ephesus, but it is pertinent to this subject today. This should be our attitude. This should be our guiding light.

***Ephesians 4:32.*** *And be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you. (KJV)*

We are to be easily entreated as the scriptures say. When somebody comes to us in repentance, we should be overwhelmingly glad, because we're glad for them, but we've also completely forgiven them already. There's no problem in acknowledging forgiveness.

Therefore, let's follow the deacon, Stephen's example. Turn to Acts 7. Stephen gave a sermon and he basically told the Jews that Christ had to die because of their individual sins. Oh, they didn't like that. They even bit him. People rushed up and grabbed him and started chewing on his arm.

***Acts 7:59.*** *And they [the Jews] stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.  
60) And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice ... (KJV)*

Notice his last words.

*60b) ... Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. (KJV)*

With his last words, Stephen had a forgiving attitude toward those who were stoning him, biting him, and slapping him. With his last breath, he said, "God, they don't know what they're doing. Lay not this sin to their charge."

We should have the same attitude. They hadn't repented. In fact, they hated him. They were filled with anger, spurred by Satan. They hadn't repented. I'm sure some of them knew what they were doing, but he said, "God, don't lay this sin onto them. They'll know down the road. When their time comes, they will acknowledge their sin and they will repent." We should have that same attitude.

When we sin, what do we want God to do? We want God to remove the sin as far as the east is from the west. The earth being in a circle, that's an infinite distance, the east from the west.

***Psalm 103:12.** As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. (KJV)*

We want God to do that with us, so we need to do that with those who sin against us. Remove the sin as far as the east is from the west. "God, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing. I don't hold it against them. I'm not going to have any bitterness. I'm not going to have resentment. I'm not going to have any turmoil. I'm not going to stay awake at night, trying to figure out how to get back at them and fight against them. I'm just going to do what Stephen did. Don't count it against them. Have mercy on them."

If we do that, we will have our sins forgiven readily and we will be at peace.

So we have seen, looking at these scriptures and others, that the Bible is clear. We must forgive at all times. We must forgive all of those who sin against us at all times. There are no qualifiers and no exceptions.

Then when someone has offended us or sinned against us, we've already forgiven them. It's not an issue with us when they come up to us and say, "I'm sorry. Ten years ago I did this to you and I am so sorry." It's so easy to say, "Not a problem. We can reconcile. I'm happy with you. I don't hold anything against you. Thank you for letting me know."

Reconciliation happens like that between two people. There are no barriers now.

So as we approach the Passover, we need to understand this concept. We need to go back and search our hearts to make sure that we have really forgiven everyone who has sinned against us. We hold no grudges, no bitterness, no resentment. We will be ready when they come to us and we can immediately forgive and respond to that.

So let's follow Christ's example. Let's follow the Father's example. Let's follow Stephen's example in this whole subject of forgiveness and let's not let a lack of forgiveness be a stumbling block and potentially block us from being in God's kingdom.