

Reconciliation and Forgiveness

Key Verse

"Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other..." Ephesians 4:32a

Basic Biblical Understanding

Prior to reading this article, first read the article entitled "[Reconciliation](#)." That article shares the foundational principles for biblical reconciliation. This article focuses on the importance of forgiveness as an aspect of reconciliation.

Let's start with some definitions. Forgiveness is to pardon someone, to release them from a debt, or to cancel an obligation. Reconciliation is the restoration of that relationship or the resolution of that conflict. Forgiveness removes the debt; reconciliation mends the relationship. You can forgive someone who doesn't want to reconcile; but you cannot reconcile with someone who's unwilling to forgive.

Once a person is willing to forgive, there are 3 possible combinations between forgiveness and reconciliation. Let's explore each individually.

First, there can be full forgiveness plus full reconciliation. In this scenario, a relationship has been divided, and things were addressed in a redemptive manner. Full forgiveness takes place, the tension is removed, and the relationship is fully reconciled. This scenario is optimal.

Second, there can be full forgiveness plus partial reconciliation. Two people may fully forgive each other, work on reconciliation, but the relationship never returns to its former state. It's not necessarily that people are unwilling to do what it takes. It's often an issue based on relational dynamics. Relationships form through the cumulative impact of time, conversations, experiences, love, trust, respect, shared interests, and other things. When any of those aspects are broken or missing, the relationship struggles to move forward.

Third, there can be full forgiveness with no reconciliation. This scenario may be the case for a person who has been raped or robbed by a stranger. Jesus tells us to forgive. We need to forgive to be free, but in that situation, there's no relationship to reconcile. Another possibility is if the offender refuses to repent of their sin. According to Matthew 18:15–17, 1 Corinthians 5:11, Titus 3:10–11, and 2 Thessalonians 3:14–15, we're told to keep our distance until repentance happens. Forgiveness can occur without their repentance, but reconciliation requires them to repent.

In each scenario, it begins with full forgiveness. Forgiveness is a choice made possible by the grace of God. You might not be able to change the other person or control how far reconciliation will go. However, you can ask God to give you the ability to fully forgive and remain open to reconciliation in the future.

Verses (ask God to show you how they apply to your life)

- "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." Matthew 6:12
- "Bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you." Colossians 3:13

Helpful Questions and Application

1. Is anything getting in the way of you fully forgiving someone? If so, ask God to reveal the issue and then submit it to Him in prayer.
2. How do you know if you've truly forgiven someone? It's easy to say, "I forgive you," but it's harder to truly forgive. How do you know if forgiveness has happened?

Additional Resources

Scripture references: Mark 11:25; Matthew 6:14; Luke 17:3–4

WordTruth article: ["Forgiveness—Know the Basics"](#)