

Forgiving Those Who Are Not Sorry

It's commonly taught that if someone sins against you then you must forgive them even if they're not sorry about what they did. This is often seen in the case of murders, where the family of the murder victim forgives the murderer even though he isn't the least bit sorry about anything.

However, is that what the Bible teaches? The answer is no, it's not:

Luke 17:3-4: "Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him."

This verse clearly says that if someone wrongs you then you should *rebuke them*. If the person then *repents* you must forgive them, but that last step – the step of repentance – is required. There can be no forgiveness apart from repentance.

Does God forgive people who haven't repented? No, He doesn't. Does God let people into Heaven who have refused to repent of their sins and ask forgiveness? Absolutely not! The Bible makes it quite clear that repentance is a required part of salvation:

Matthew 3:1-2: "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Matthew 4:17: “From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Matthew 9:13: “But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

Jesus preached a gospel of repentance and said that He came to call sinners to repentance. Repentance is absolutely required in order to be reconciled with God. It's not optional! If you want to be forgiven you must repent.

We must never forget that repentance is a required part of reconciliation, not an optional thing that isn't important. We must not overlook the clear teaching in Luke 17 that repentance is vital. If someone repents then we must forgive them – *but they do have to repent*. As Luke 17:4 points out, it's possible they will keep on sinning. However, if they do and then turn around and repent, we must forgive them. But repentance is required.

This whole area of reconciliation has been neglected in our time, but it's vitally important. Jesus said that reconciliation was so critical that it even impacts our ability to give gifts to God:

Matthew 5:23-24: “Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.”

Jesus said that if you've wronged your brother, don't even try to give God anything because He's not interested in receiving it! Instead go and repent of your wrongdoing and become reconciled to your brother. After you've repented you can then

come and give your gift to God – but you must be reconciled first. It may be that your brother will forgive you, or it may be that he won't; regardless, you have to repent and ask forgiveness. *It's required.*

The modern idea that it doesn't matter if they're sorry is nonsense. Forgiveness is the canceling of a debt, and the debt *cannot* be canceled in the absence of repentance. God Himself will only cancel your debts if you repent. He won't forgive anyone who isn't sorry and who refuses to ask forgiveness. God will never say “I don't care if you're sorry or not; I forgive you anyway”. Repentance is mandatory.

Are we really supposed to believe that even though *God Himself* won't forgive people who aren't sorry, we are supposed to? Is it true that we're supposed to be more forgiving than God? That's not what Luke 17:3-4 teaches. If our brother sins against us we should rebuke him; if he repents we should forgive him. But *forgiveness isn't possible without repentance.*