



NEW LIFE

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“For the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:9)

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LORD’S DAY 30 DECEMBER 2007

FORGIVE AND FORGET?

Almost 20 years ago, a severe quarrel broke out between my younger brother and me. We had quarrelled quite frequently before that time, but usually, they were over in a short while. But that time, it got worst and worst, until it became a fistfight. We had recently become Christians, and we could not understand what was happening. When we finally separated and went into a separate corner of the house, I felt a deep grief in my heart; I knew I had sinned against the Lord, and what was more, it was Christmas day (which I had held superstitiously to be a holy day). Of course, I thought that it was my brother’s fault that we quarrelled in the first place, but that did not matter any more. If Christ did not forgive me for my sins against Him, I would still be heading for eternal damnation.

No more than an hour passed, when for the first time in my life, I walked up to my brother and apologised for fighting with him. It did not matter whose fault it was, I knew I was wrong to behave the way I did. My brother was too stunned to respond, but he agreed to pray together with me. He was two years younger than me, and younger as a Christian by a few months. Although he did not say anything, I knew that he did forgive me, and what inward peace I felt in my soul! It did not matter that I had to swallow my pride, it felt good to be reconciled. That was the last time we ever quarrelled, not to mention fight!

What we experienced that evening in 1982 was the feeling of forgiveness and the consequent forgetting. Although we were still not fully taught on the Bible, we had already experienced the necessity and power of forgiveness for healing a broken relationship. You may say we were taught of the Holy Spirit so that we knew intuitively what to do. But what we knew intuitively is actually taught in clear by our Lord.

Immediately, after the events at the Mount of Transfiguration, our Lord returned with His disciples to Capernaum (Mt 17:24), and soon began to teach them. One of the things that He taught them was how a Christian ought to respond to a brother who sins against him (Mt 18:15–20). He gives four steps, which are still applicable to us: (1) Bring it up to him alone (v. 15). (2) If he does not repent, bring along one or two witnesses (v. 16). (3) If he does not repent still, tell it to the church, which would mean telling to the elders for church discipline (v. 17a). (4) If he still refuses to repent, then the church should ex-communicate him (vv. 17b–18).

As He spoke, the disciples must have pondered in their hearts: Did not the Lord earlier teach us to pray, “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Mt 6:12)? Did He not explain, “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” (Mt 6:14–15)? But now He seems to be saying something else: if someone sins against you, you must confront the person. Perhaps, some pressing questions began to burn in the minds of the disciples: What is the relationship between forgiving the person and confronting him? If we are to forgive, why do we need to confront? And if we confront, what if the person is unrepentant? And if he says he is repentant, but he commits the same sin again, what do we do? After all, there are many who...

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claim to repent but do not really repent. How many times should we forgive?

So many questions, which to ask? Peter chose the simplest. When the Lord Jesus stopped speaking, he immediately came to Him and asked, “Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?” (v. 21). Perhaps he expected the Lord to answer, “It doesn’t mean that I teach you to forgive, that must you just keep forgiving and be taken advantage of.” Instead, the Lord answered, “I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven” (Mt 18:22). This, of course, does not mean that we are to forgive just 490 times, but that we are to forgive as much and as many times as necessary.

Then perhaps sensing the questions that might be in Peter’s mind, our Lord told the disciples a parable that would answer some of their perplexities.

A certain king called all his servants together to reckon with them. One of them owed him 10,000 talents (1 talent is believed to be 6,000 denarii; 1 denarius was a day’s wage for a vineyard worker. 10,000 talents = 60 million denarii; if you earn \$20 a day, that’s \$1.2 billion). That’s practically impossible for the servant to pay, and so the king ordered that he and his family be sold as slaves (v. 25). The servant pleaded with him, and promised to pay back (v. 26). It was quite obviously impossible for him to pay back, but the king was moved with compassion and forgave him, and cancelled his debts (v. 27). But the servant went out and found a fellow servant who owed him 100 denarii (v. 28). That second servant pleaded like the first did, but he was shown no clemency. Instead he was sent to prison until he should pay (vv. 29–30). This matter was reported to the king (v. 31), who was greatly infuriated by his servant’s lack of gratitude, and so sent him to the tormentors.

Our Lord concludes by saying: “So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses” (Mt 18:35).

We may learn three things from this parable: Firstly, we learn *why* we should forgive; secondly, *when* we should forgive; and thirdly, *how* we should forgive.

Why Should We Forgive?

The primary lesson point is obvious: Every believer must learn to forgive because we have received forgiveness from God. And our forgiveness is not just for a small crime, but for rebellion against the King of kings, the Lord of lords. And our forgiveness was bought with an infinite price, the blood of Christ; and we deserve nothing at all. If we have been so forgiven, should we not be ever willing to forgive? Indeed, a bitter, unforgiving spirit is a sure mark of an unregenerate heart. This is why the Lord admonishes us: “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” (Mt 6:14–15; cf. Mt 18:35).

When Should we Forgive?

Notice that in this parable, the king did not simply cancel the debt but he called up his servant to reckon with him. In a sense he lets his servant know how much he owes him, and lets him know what he deserves. That is consistent with what our Lord just taught concerning a brother who sins against us.

When a brother-in-Christ wrongs us, we should not just quietly keep silent about it and say we forgive him, especially when what is done is clearly a sinful act. Rather it is our duty to confront the brother to let him know that he has sinned. When he repents of his sin, and you forgive him, how sweet that forgiveness and reconciliation will be!

Indeed, whenever we are aware that there is any tension between ourselves and a brother-in-Christ, we ought always to take as much initiative as possible to seek reconciliation. Our Lord says, “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” (Mt 5:23–24). When you have something against your...

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brother you ought to do the same according to the principle of Matthew 18:15–17. This is especially so in the context of the local church.

But, two questions come to mind: (1) Should we not forgive unconditionally? (2) Christ's instruction involves conflict between brethren, what about the case where the aggrieved party is a Christian whereas the guilty party is an unbeliever?

Should not Forgiveness be Unconditional?

To the first question, my answer is “yes” and “no.” Why? Because forgiveness has three aspects: (1) An *attitudinal* aspect, by which we must not hold any grudge or a vindictive spirit against anyone, and must be very ready to forgive and to pray for a person even where he has not expressed repentance; (2) a *reconciliatory* aspect of personal pardon, by which we may receive into favour and fellowship such as expresses repentance; and (3) a *judicial* aspect of full forgiveness, where sin is overlooked and justice is covered in mercy.

Let me illustrate what I mean. Imagine yourself to be the mother of a young boy who was knocked down by a car while he was crossing at the traffic light in front of the church. Now, it may be very hard, but by God's grace, you must maintain an attitude of forgiveness, so bear no grudge against the person who killed your son by his reckless driving. This is what the Lord teaches us when He says, “And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses” (Mk 11:25). We should never bear ill will against anyone, especially to believers. Bearing ill will against anyone is a breaking of the Sixth Commandment, “Thou shalt not kill.” Yes, it is most difficult to forgive (or to have a forgiving spirit towards) those who insist that they are right and who are unrepentant, but this is required and pleasing to the Lord. But note that when the Lord teaches us to forgive (unconditionally) as we pray, it is obvious that He is not telling us to go to the person and tell him that we forgive him unconditionally. Every time the Scripture speaks of going to the offender, it is to seek repentance on his part rather than to offer an unconditional forgiveness. This does not mean that it is always wrong to do so, but it means firstly that it is not our duty to do so, and secondly, that we must exercise care not to give the wrong impression.

But suppose when you confront the errant driver, he refuses to acknowledge that it was his fault, when it was clearly so since the pedestrian light had turned green when your son crossed the road. And the police had confirmed that he was driving under the influence of alcohol. Can you tell the man who killed your son that you forgive him? You may indeed do so if all you mean is that you bear no grudge against him; but remember that in such a case, for the offender, it would at best make him less defensive and at worst pamper his conscience so that he deludes himself as to the severity of the crime.

On the other hand, if the man is very repentant and when he is in prison, he writes to ask you for forgiveness, then, however difficult it may be, you ought to give him your forgiveness and tell him so. So our Lord tells us, “Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and *if he repent*, forgive him” (Lk 17:3). Yes, if he repents, forgive him, and pursue the matter no more. But if he does not repent, you ought to pursue repentance according to the guideline given by the Lord (i.e., Mt 18:15–17).

But bear in mind that though you express personal pardon, you do not have the prerogative to say, “let him go free.” No, justice must be met. This is the reason why Christ had to die for our sins, because the judicial element for forgiveness cannot simply be overlooked. It cannot be overlooked in the civil realm, much less in the spiritual and divine realm. Sin, after all, is affront against God (Ps 51:4). Technically sin is always against God. Someone can wrong us, and we can forgive him, but who are we to forgive his sins against God when he wrongs us? The Pharisees were right when they ask the rhetoric question: “Who can forgive sins but God only?” (Mk 2:7). And God's forgiveness flows through the blood of Christ.

It is for this reason too that we ought to be careful not to give any impression that there is forgiveness without repentance. And moreover, failing to warn against sin in the church is not...

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only to be party to the sin, but to allow an Achan to defile the church. A wife whose husband is committing adultery ought not just to meekly accept her husband's action. She may be a very noble woman, and willing immediately to forgive him emotionally, and bear no more ill will against him, but she is responsible to Christ and His church too. So, she ought to confront him according to the principles laid down in Matthew 18, praying fervently, of course, that he would repent.

What About the Case of a Guilty Unbeliever?

Now what if the person who does wrong against you is an unbeliever? Your colleague at work backstabbed you with something that is totally untrue. The robber came into your house and not only rob you but hurt you badly.

In these cases, I believe, we may apply some of the principles taught by our Lord, although His instruction pertains primarily to trespasses between brethren (Mt 18:15). I would suggest that when at all possible, we should confront the person of the wrong done, especially if he does not know or does not acknowledge that he has done wrong. But beyond that we must learn to forgive as our Lord forgave when He prayed on the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34); or how Stephen prayed when he was being stoned, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts 7:60). Yes, it is not wrong to pray for forgiveness for those who wrong us, even though we know that unless there is genuine repentance and cleansing through the blood of Christ, God will not forgive them. To forgive a wrong is our responsibility, to forgive a sin is God's prerogative. Our praying for those who wrong us, even if they are unrepentant, is simply an expression of our love for the other person (Mt 5:44).

A story is told of how a British man in South Africa once caught a native African crossing his field. He caught hold of the man and accused him of trying to steal his horse. The African man explained that he was simply taking a short cut to his house, but the British refused to believe. Instead he decided to teach the African people a lesson. He cut off the left hand of the man and hung him on a tree. Several years later, the British was on the way home when he got caught in a storm. And since the large field was uncovered and it would be dangerous to cross it in the storm, he decided to find shelters in some of the houses near the edge of his field. He entered into one, but no one was in, and soon he fell asleep. When he awoke, a black man was standing over him. He was instantly fearing for his life, and when the man lifted up his left arm, the British noticed that his hand had been chopped off, and he was all the more afraid. But the African man said, I was the man whom you hung on the tree, I was the man whom you maim for life. Now you are in my house and I have power to hurt you, and revenge is sweet. But I am a Christian, therefore, I forgive you for what you did. What do you think the British felt when he heard those words? Though, it may not always be right, and indeed can be often wrong to proclaim forgiveness unconditionally the way that the African man did, his attitude of forgiveness is worthy of emulation.

How Should we Forgive?

Notice that in the parable, once the servant pleaded, the king forgave him immediately (vv. 26–27). And it was a total forgiveness. His debt,—all 10,000 talents,—was cancelled and he was not punished by imprisonment at all, but was free to go. Yes, that is what is meant by forgiving and forgetting. This man appeared repentant and the king forgave him, and forgot his debt. But wait, does forgetting mean that we must forget everything, and start afresh? Again I must say "yes" and "no."

Let me begin with "no." No, if the repentance is not genuine, we must confront him again. Notice that this was what the king did. Because his slave would not forgive his co-slave of 100 denarii, when he himself was forgiven of 60 million denarii, the king revoked his earlier forgiveness and threw his slave to the tormentors until he paid up his debt. But why did not the king, in the first place, check to make very sure that his servant was truly repentant? Well, the simple reason is that we are not required to do so. Our Lord teaches this fact clearly: "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" (Lk 17:4). Yes, at the point of confrontation, we must accept the word of the person who has wronged us. If he says he repent, you must forgive him, you must not suspect that he is...

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not sincere. If after saying he repents, he commits the same sin again, you must confront him again. If he again repents, you must forgive without considering how many times he had repented and went back on his word. This is hard, but we must always give others the benefit of the doubt.

But yes, we must forget if the repentance is genuine; we should never mention it again. Such is the case when God forgives us. When He forgives us, it is on the basis of Christ's substitutionary death for us. We begin a new life with Him anew, He casts all our sins into the depth of the sea (Mic 7:19) and He removes our transgressions from us for "as far as the east is from the west" (Ps 103:12). Such must be our forgiveness to those who wrong us. And yes, as long as the person does not sin against you again in the same manner, you must assume that his repentance is genuine, and therefore forgive and forget.

But what does forgetting entails? It entails (1) not *ruminating* it—not dwelling about what happened and indulging in self-pity. If you keep congratulating yourself that you've forgiven a person even though you were badly hurt by him, then you had not really forgiven; (2) not *raising* it again—if you forgive your wife for something she has done, it must never be brought up again when you quarrel, or you have not forgiven. Moreover, "He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends" (Prov 17:9); (3) not *rumouring* it—if you say you forgive someone you must not tell others of how you were hurt by this person. Doing so would be like pulling off the bandage to show others how badly you were cut. How could there be any healing then?

Conclusion

We've been looking thus far at forgiveness from a very technical point of view. I did so because I believe that there is quite a bit of confusion on the subject today. But the most valuable thing, I believe, that might be achieved by this article is that if you have still not forgiven someone who have done you wrong, that you resolve now to do so at the soonest possible moment. You say, "Oh, I've forgiven, it is just that I cannot forget, I still feel the hurt, I'm human you know." Well, beloved, perhaps you have not really forgiven. Are you upset about someone, and you did not confront that person? Do you know you have wronged someone, or suspect that someone has aught against you, and you have not sought forgiveness and reconciliation? I would appeal to you, for the Lord's sake, to take the initiative for reconciliation rather than wait for the other person to initiate.

Pastor JJ Lim

Pilgrim Covenant Church, Singapore

(Adapted from Pilgrim Covenant Church bulletin dated 8 April 2001)

Editor's Note:

Before we step into the New Year, let us do what Jesus said in, Matthew 5:21-24, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. 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."

Testimony from Sis Feng Qian

(Extracted from her email to worshippers at New Life BP Church, London)



Hi everyone,

Just decided to drop an email to update everyone, and to wish everyone a blessed Christmas, especially since I have been rather slack in updating on my whereabouts and all. I've just completed my first term in NUS, and it's really quite different being back in Singapore, with parents around all the time etc. Had to get used to living in Singapore again. Am settled in Life, and unfortunately cannot serve that much since parents have mandated that I must have breakfast with them on Sundays before church.

I've joined the Varsity Christian Fellowship in school, and we recently had a camp where we studied the book of Amos. Did not realise how much growing I had done in New Life London till I attended the camp, when I was called to lead bible studies...yet at the same time, it was then that I really saw how God provides what we need, and all the more abundantly, for given the limited time to prepare the bible studies the Holy Spirit worked very powerfully in the group, and let some who are not well-aquainted with the idea of God being a holy and righteous God who punishes realise that that is one aspect of His character they had not considered. On the other hand, though there were some in the group who are still rather young in the faith or in their study of the Word, but they really had the childlike exuberant faith which ultimately is the most crucial...may we not lose that devotion to our Lord Jesus.

On the bright side, my parents are okay with me seeking baptism! God willing I should be getting baptised this Easter =) Praise God for that, especially since I did not expect them to agree without a fight...and today for the Christmas Eve service my mum and brother came along. Well I guess sometimes we worry too much about whether they would object, and do not even get down to talking about God or asking them to come for church activities. I've come to realise that our worrying does not help matters, whereas submitting the matter to God first and foremost would, if it is in His will that things should work out in the manner desired for. Maybe I should stop doing the civil servant middle management thing and censor prayer requests thinking that they will not come to pass even before praying about it! Pray for my family that they would be open to the gospel...I am really thankful for the opportunities to talk about Christ to my parents, though they are not too open to the idea - but any opportunity is definitely better than none, and any opinion better than apathy.

I pray that everyone in New Life London is doing fine, and that Bro Mark Chen and Huimin have reached London safely, and are not too jetlagged. Miss all of you lots with the fellowship and the encouragement that is ever present. I guess I'm having a bit of difficulty fitting in church since it really feels as though I'm between ages and concerns...but I can really see what you all meant when you said I have to take the effort to get involved in church. Being in such a big church now is really different from being in a small church like New Life London, and I'm really thankful that it was in New Life London that I ultimately yielded complete control of my life to our Lord Jesus, and took my first steps in walking with Him, for the accountability and watchful eye which all of you blessed me with would have been more difficult to come by elsewhere.

Pray that this Christmas would be one where we reflect on the true meaning of the birth of Christ, and His sacrifice and love for us!

Soli Deo Gloria!

Feng Qian



Carolling session at residence of Elder Ford on 23 Dec 2007



Family worship session at residence of Jee and Yanning on 24 Dec 2007

WELCOME TO NEW LIFE B-P CHURCH LONDON

CHURCH THEME: WALK IN THE NEWNESS OF LIFE (Romans 6:4)

Our **worship services** begin promptly at **11.00 am and 4.00 pm**.

Please stay back for Bible Study and fellowship lunch after the morning worship and for tea after the evening service. Do invite your friends to come to Church.

Worship Services			WELCOME
Morning	<i>Today: 30/12/2007</i>	<i>Next Week: 06/01/2008</i>	<p>We extend a warm welcome to all worshippers this Lord's Day. We especially like to welcome Tan Chor Koon, Julien Chua, Sherry Chua, Elizabeth Tay and Yao Hua Zhao to the morning worship service last Lord's Day.</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">NEWS/ANNOUNCEMENTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Worship: Thank God for a blessed carolling session at the residence of Elder Ford on 23 Dec 2007 (Sun) and family worship session at the residence of Jee and Yanning on 24 Dec 2007 (Mon). For those who would like to open up their homes for family worship next year, please contact Pr Mok. • Memory Verse Exercise: Please note that the memory verse final review exercise for the entire year of 2007 is due on end January 2008. • Book Table: Please feel free to browse the book table and help yourself to any book of interest. • Sabbath School: Please note that class is held at the Library after the morning worship. All children are encouraged to sit with their parents during the main service. • Those serving on the Lord's Day for both morning and evening worship services: Please gather behind the pulpit area at 10.30am for prayer.
<i>Chairman:</i>	Jonathan Kim	John Poh	
<i>Preacher:</i>	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	
<i>Message:</i>	Laying Aside and Going Forward	Behold, I Make All Things New	
<i>Text:</i>	Hebrews 12:1-2	Revelations 21:1-5	
<i>Organist:</i>	Anthony	Yanning	
Evening			
<i>Chairman:</i>	John Poh	Jonathan Kim	
<i>Preacher:</i>	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	
<i>Message:</i>	The End of All Things is at Hand	Redeeming The Time For The Days Are Evil	
<i>Text:</i>	1 Peter 4:7-11	Ephesians 5:15-17	
<i>Pianist:</i>	Grace	Joy	
Other Duties			
	<i>Today: 30/12/2007</i>	<i>Next Week: 06/01/2008</i>	
<i>Ushers</i>	Joyce/Wah Soon	Chin Kiong/Esmeralda	
<i>Sunday Sch:</i>	No Class	Carol	
<i>Lunch:</i>	Maureen	Constance	
<i>Washing-up:</i>	Volunteers	Volunteers	
<i>Bible Study:</i>	No DHW Class	DHW - Genesis	
Appointments of the Week			
Fri 04 Jan	7:30 pm	Young Adults Fellowship: YAF Meeting	
Sat 05 Jan	4.00 pm	Prayer Meeting & Bible Study: Led by Pr Mok	
Last Week's Worship Service Collections			
Offering: £371.84		Lunch: No Collection	
Memory Verse			
<i>Last Week (Dec 07 Wk 4): 2 Corinthians 5:21</i>			
For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.			
<i>This Week (Dec 07 Wk 5): Hebrews 12:1-2</i>			
Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.			