



A SPECIAL EVENING WITH  
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ON THE TOPIC OF  
**FORGIVENESS  
AND GUILT**

FOLLOWED BY Q&A

# Getting Rid of Guilt and Shameful Feelings and Learning to Forgive

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“People who are merciless, unable to pity others and receive pity, simply have a hard life full of unsolvable problems.” Dallas Willard

## **Introduction:** The Benefits of Giving and Receiving Forgiveness (Properly Understood)

### 1. Spiritual Benefits

Peace with God and increased experience of His love and kindness

Removal of guilt and shame

Power to seek God and stand for His Kingdom

### 2. Relational Benefits

Harmony replaces anger, contempt, and discord

Removal of disruptive behavior of attack or withholding

Achieving a reputation of being safe, open, and accepting

### 3. Moral Benefits

It's (usually) the right thing to do

It avoids hypocrisy (I want forgiveness but won't extend it to others.)

### 4. Physical Health benefits

Lowers blood pressure, chances of cancer and heart disease, agitated nervous system

Strengthens immune system and general health

### 5. Psychological Benefits

Allows me to be kind and nurturing to myself

Helps to get rid of anxiety, anger, and depression

Makes me less sensitive to being wronged

### 6. Helps release suppressed anger and bitterness (these are leukemia of the soul) that is disproportionately triggered in situations that don't warrant it.



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7. Reflection: If Christianity is true, one would predict that its teaching about wisdom and spiritual, physical, and psychological practices would be good for us. It turns out that they are and this lends support to the truth of Christianity

## I. The Distinction between False Subjective Guilt/Shame and Objective Guilt/Shame

- A. False Subjective Guilt and Shame is having inappropriate guilt/shaming feelings and attitudes towards oneself.
- B. Objective Guilt and Shame is genuinely doing something wrong and shameful.
- C. One can have Objective Guilt/Shame without Subjective Guilt/Shame and Conversely.
- D. The fundamental problem causing a lack of self-forgiveness is being hard on oneself.** It is being prideful. A prideful character puts one in a position of lacking the ability to have pity for oneself. Such pity is a prerequisite for forgiving.
- E. Based on Romans 8:1 (Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.) and Colossians 2:13-14 (And when you were dead in your wrongdoings and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our wrongdoings, 14 having canceled the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, **which was hostile to us**; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”), Jesus-followers should no longer experience subjective guilt/shame. Instead, they should feel Godly sorrow. Godly sorrow is a sense of sadness for what one has done or for one’s lack of character-growth in some area. It is optimistic and positive in that it prompts one to take pity on oneself as a fallen, broken person, to acknowledge one’s wrongdoing or character shortcomings, and to resolve with God’s help to grow in this area. And it draws one towards God. One comes to God **in the midst of one’s sorry state**, rather than waiting until one cleans-up oneself first. By contrast, retaining subjective guilt/shame causes one to carry experiences of condemnation, prideful self-sufficiency, and self-preoccupation. It also fosters the habit of earning restoration with God by asking for His acceptance only after one



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has punished oneself enough to approach the mercy of God.

## II. What Forgiveness is and is not

### A. What forgiveness is not

1. Forgetting and reconciling
2. Letting someone off the hook by trying to keep them from suffering the natural consequences of their acts or releasing them from the just punishment they deserve.
3. Approval, excusing, justifying, or pardoning (releasing from the consequences of) what the person did.
4. Refusing to take the wrong seriously and attempting to minimize or rationalize it.

### B. What forgiveness is

1. To forgive someone is to have mercy for and take pity on them as the basis of choosing not to make that person suffer for what he/she did. You release and abandon the person to God. We release our bitterness and desire for revenge. It is cancelling a debt owed to you, wiping the slate clean.
2. Not keeping a track-record in your mind of what they did.
3. Not seeking to make the person afraid of or intimidated by you, though appropriate self-protection is often necessary.
4. Forgiving God for letting this happen to you.
5. It begins with a choice that initiates a (sometimes long) process.
6. It fundamentally involves **cultivating a dispositional readiness to forgive**. While it includes specific acts of forgiving, dispositional readiness is the root issue.
7. You lay down your (often legitimate) anger and an attitude of being a victim.

## III. How to Cultivate a Dispositional Readiness to Forgive

- A. Remember: God loves to forgive. He enjoys it. He does not forgive grudgingly. Never!
- B. Learning to pity others and oneself is fundamental. This is achieved by 1)



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recognizing the broken, disastrous state of our shared humanity; 2) asking yourself what you would like others to do to you; 3) treating others and yourself like you hope and envision a close friend or dear loved one would treat you.

- C. It is important to remember that God has forgiven me when I did not deserve it, and I want others to do the same to me.
- D. Picture the person as a little child being mistreated, fearful, and adopting (inappropriate) survival coping strategies. Picture Jesus holding your offender as a child close to His chest in a loving, protecting embrace. Imagine what you would be like if you had grown up in those horrible circumstances.
- E. Do a benefits/burdens assessment on working through forgiveness vs. holding on to unforgiveness.

## **V. Should we judge others? It depends. Consider these two verses:**

Matthew 7: 1-3, 5: “Do not judge, so that you will not be judged. 2 For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and [y your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. 3 Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?... 5 You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the [f]speck out of your brother’s eye!

Galatians 6:1: Brothers and sisters, even if a person is caught in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual are to restore such a person in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you are not tempted as well.

- A. Judging as condemning, having contempt for, self-exaltation – NO
- B. Judging as evaluating, assessing, discerning, admonishing – YES

## **VI. Important Texts to Keep Nearby**

Psalm 103:10-14: He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor rewarded us according to our guilty deeds. 11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who [a]fear Him. 12 As far as the east is from



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the west, So far has He removed our wrongdoings from us. 13 Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the LORD has compassion on those who [b]fear Him. 14 For He Himself knows [c]our form; He is mindful that we are *nothing but* dust.

I Peter 3:8: To sum up, all *of you* be harmonious, sympathetic, loving, compassionate, *and* humble;

**VII. ADDENDUM:** What are we to make of I John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous, so that He will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”? If we are already forgiven by accepting the gospel, why should we confess our sins again as recommended by this verse? Our pardon was granted when we embraced the gospel. Acts of practicing I John 1:9 do not regrant a pardon we already have. Rather, like the regular celebration of the Lord’s Table, such acts are reminders of our need for forgiveness, and they are occasions of experiencing cleansing and release.

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