

# Angie's Marriage Column ~ August 4, 2010

## How True (Godly) Forgiveness Works

**Ask Angie:** Hi Angie - I'm looking for guidance on forgiveness. My husband had an affair and repented and nearly 3 years have passed. My struggle is forgiving the woman, as she was also a close friend. I've had no contact with her but don't feel as if I've forgiven her. What does biblical forgiveness look like when there is no expectation of a relationship with that person? I know I still harbor hate towards her. Overall I rarely think of her and when I do, I try & revert to some memorized versus. But I'm not sure this is the form of forgiveness the Lord wants. Thanks for your advice.

**Marriage Guidance:** We think it is great that you are working on your marriage and also wanting to forgive the woman. I sense your struggle to find forgiveness for this woman, which is very normal. But your willingness to forgive her is wonderful and a good example for others to learn from. It's hard to forgive someone who has trespassed against us...in fact we cannot truly forgive on our own.

We have to ask Christ [to help us to forgive those who have trespassed against us](#); sometimes we have to forgive others over and over again, especially those people we live with. All sincere believers have Christ's Spirit within them and it is through Christ that all things are possible, such as forgiveness. Once you finally do forgive this person you will come to see that the hate you feel for her is actually pity and sadness.

Spiritual sickness runs rampant in society today. Called out ones (believers) have a [responsibility to be examples](#) to them through our behavior and lifestyle. And one way we do this is through forgiving those who have trespassed against us. There are many people who are spiritually sick just like there are people who are physically sick. But [those who are spiritually sick don't need a doctor they need God!](#)

Your example of forgiveness for others helps them to be encouraged to seek Christ for their life too. Do you see how that works? We should not hate those who are spiritually bankrupt but help them come to their knees in sorrow for their sins, so they too may be forgiven from Christ and lead a life that is pleasing to the Lord.

*“If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet: ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done for you”. John 13: 14, 15)*

But before we can truly forgive others we must be free of our own demons and negative baggage that consumes our thoughts and our life. How can we help others to come to Christ when we ourselves have not come to Christ with our own problems? To understand how forgiveness works we have to be born again and have repented of our

wayward lifestyle, whatever that may be, so we may walk in the light where we are given a new perspective and hope for living.

“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. (Mark 11:25)

Don't misunderstand. We are not saying that you have not already done this; perhaps you have given up living for self and are now living for Christ...because that is what it takes to really forgive someone—we have to live for Christ, not for self. Otherwise forgiveness will be superficial—it won't help you and it won't help the person you are trying to forgive.

“Forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.” (Colossians 3:13)

[Many people struggle with forgiveness](#) and it's because they have not let go of their own burdens of resentment and hurt to Jesus Christ. Forgiveness is more for the forgiver than for the person we are forgiving. True forgiveness frees our whole being of bitterness and this is why in the Alcoholic's Anonymous program one of the steps deals with forgiving those who have harmed you in some way. A major reason people become addicted to a substance is because of pent up [bitterness and resentment living within their soul](#). The only way to free ourselves from these [negative emotions](#) is through Jesus Christ.

“Jesus saith unto him, ‘I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.’ (John 14:6)

## How to Know If You Have Truly Forgiven

“Yes dear, I forgive you.” said the husband to his wife. But the wife doesn't think her husband really has forgiven her. His actions are sporting a different attitude than what he is saying. We can talk a good talk and we can muster up some good lines and say how we have forgiven until we are blue in the face but if our actions say something different then it is all for nothing. We have to be willing to set aside our stubbornness and actually forgive from the heart. If we hold on to a proud attitude and only mouth the words of forgiveness, what's that? That's a lie.

In fact, we are lying to ourselves by believing we have forgiven. When we try and validate in our minds that we have forgiven, we feel a sense of comfort, which somewhat diminishes the hurt we are feeling. But this is only a temporary feel good tactic and does not actually work. Forgiving is difficult to do because we have been wounded by the actions of another. The problem is that wound will determine how we forgive. If we allow our feelings to dictate our actions, true forgiveness won't happen.

This is the motivation behind the Alcoholic Anonymous program. The program encourages the alcoholic to forgive all the people they need to forgive, so they can finally be free of the suffering they are feeling. Once free, they may not be tempted to go back to the drink again. But there again, this doesn't always work, it depends on what foundation the alcoholic has decided to base their forgiveness on. It is all about having a change of heart and having compassion for others.

“If any of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” (John 8:7 NIV)

How will you know if you have truly forgiven someone? When you feel a heavy weight has been lifted from your heart and mind you will know that Jesus has taken the suffering and pain from you. And that will be your change in attitude. Jesus Christ, died for forgiveness, therefore it is only through Him that we can forgive! We do not have the power on our own to forgive. God gave us forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16 NIV)

Do you see how that works? Why did Jesus have to suffer and die for our sins? Why couldn't He have just died from old age? Because Jesus was part of God's plan. Jesus is a representation for the world to know and accept what true forgiveness and love really is? Jesus could have saved Himself but instead He endured suffering for all of us in the world.

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. (1 Peter 2:24 NIV)

Without a forgiving heart we will never know the true meaning of loving someone and experiencing how loving someone feels. Essentially, we must forgive in the same way we ourselves have been forgiven from our Savior, Jesus Christ.

“Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”

“No one, sir,” she said.

“Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.” (John 8:10,11 NIV)

We have to die to our sins by giving up those sins. Until we can accept forgiveness for our own sins, which is belief in Jesus Christ and what He has done for us, we won't be able to forgive others either.

“All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. (Acts 10:43 NIV)

Forgiveness is much more than what a million words can say. Forgiveness is in the way

we live our life and how we treat others. Forgiveness is love. We love others by our actions and not by our words. Once we actually do forgive someone we'll know what it is to love our neighbor because we realize how our neighbor deserved forgiveness from us just as much as we needed to rid the pain and suffering from our heart and mind.

Jesus said to Simon: "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven – for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little." (Luke 7:44-47 NIV)

### Exercise for Couples

How can you tell if you have truly forgiven someone?

How can you tell if someone has truly forgiven you?

Have you ever truly forgiven someone? How did it make you feel?

Why is forgiveness so important?

Should you tell the person that hurt you that you forgive them? How will they see Christ working in you, through your forgiveness of them, unless you tell them that you have forgiven them completely? God wants us to let others know that we have forgiven them so they too may have a chance to come to Him and seek forgiveness. If we are having a difficult time talking face to face with someone who has hurt us then write a letter, or call

him or her on the phone. The most important thing is to not allow harbored hate and bitterness remain within your spirit or forgiveness will never come.

Amazingly, Jesus forgave those who murdered Him. (Luke 23:34) And He also forgave one of the criminals who was hung right next to Him. (Luke 42:43)

If any of you reading this today are hurting or have pent up baggage or feel burdened by negative emotions, ask Christ to come into your life, repent and be made new in the attitudes of your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ.

“That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind. And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” (Ephesians 4:22-24)

Heaven Ministries is here for you. Frank and I are available to talk through email and we counsel couples that are willing to work on self-healing and together restore the marriage back to God. We have set up some [counseling healing packages](#) that include some of our written materials for healing as well as personal counseling with Frank and Angie.

And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprieveable in his sight. (Colossians 1:21,22)

In Christ,  
Angie and Frank

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