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THE DEVELOPMENT OF BIBLICAL FORGIVENESS IN  
REDEMPTIVE HISTORY

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
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In Partial Fulfillment  
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Doctor of Philosophy

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by  
Kyunga Song  
May 2017

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REDEMPTIVE HISTORY**

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For the glory of God

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	viii
PREFACE.....	ix
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Purpose Statement.....	3
Thesis .....	4
Methodology and Organization of Research.....	8
Major Issues regarding Divine and Human Forgiveness .....	11
An Initial Survey of Divine Forgiveness in the Bible.....	23
Conclusion .....	47
2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF FORGIVENESS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD.....	50
Divine Forgiveness in the Old Testament.....	51
From Creation to the Patriarchal Age.....	51
Abraham’s Election in Redemptive History.....	57
God’s Forgiveness in the Mosaic Period.....	60
Settlement and Monarchy Periods.....	76
The Post-Exilic Period .....	93

Chapter	Page
God’s Anger and Divine Forgiveness.....	96
Human Forgiveness in the OT .....	97
Human Forgiveness Narratives.....	98
The Victim as God’s Representative .....	103
Conditional Human Forgiveness .....	105
The Victim’s Honest Emotional Expression in the Psalms.....	106
Implicit Human Forgiveness.....	108
Explicit Human Forgiveness in the Interestamental Period .....	110
Conclusion .....	112
<b>3. FORGIVENESS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT: JUST AND GRACIOUS.....</b>	<b>114</b>
The Embodiment of Biblical Forgiveness: Jesus, the God-man.....	115
The Ministry of John the Baptist .....	116
Jesus, The Subject of Divine Forgiveness .....	117
Jesus and Repentance .....	120
Proactive Creator of Divine Forgiveness.....	122
Habitual Forgiver in Weakness .....	123
Jesus’ Identity, Humility, and Empathy .....	126
Jesus and the Person of the Holy Spirit .....	129
Development of Divine Forgiveness in the NT .....	130
Atonement in the NT .....	130
Development of the Concept of Sin .....	141
The Model of Divine Forgiveness .....	143
The Condition of Receiving Divine Forgiveness .....	147
Universal Reconciliation .....	148
Change in the Object of Divine Forgiveness .....	150
The Church as God’s Forgiving and Reconciling Community .....	150

Chapter	Page
Human Forgiveness in the NT.....	152
Explicit Emphasis on Human .....	152
Godlike Human Forgiveness: Unilateral Forgiveness.....	153
Motive for Human Forgiveness: Unilateral Love for One’s Enemy .....	157
Purpose of Human Forgiveness: Reconciliation .....	163
The Inseparable Relation between Divine and Human Forgiveness .....	168
Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Aspects of Human Forgiveness .....	170
The Holy Spirit’s Role in Human Forgiveness.....	181
Conclusion .....	183
<b>4. THE APPLICATION OF BIBLICAL HUMAN FORGIVENESS .....</b>	<b>184</b>
Basic Principles of Christian Human Forgiveness.....	185
The Subject of Human Forgiveness: the Victim.....	185
The Motive of Forgiveness: Enemy Love .....	194
The Victim’s Respect of the Offender .....	197
The Maturation of the Christian Forgiver through Sanctification .....	200
The Need for Reconciliation .....	201
The Importance of Justice and Repentance .....	204
Dynamics of Unforgiveness .....	208
Symptoms of Unforgiveness .....	210
Reasons for Unforgiveness .....	215
Practice of Forgiveness .....	219
Various Forms of Forgiveness.....	219
The Victim’s Preparation for Forgiveness.....	221
The Process of Forgiveness .....	226
Conclusion .....	234

Chapter	Page
5. CONCLUSION.....	236
Practice of Christlike Forgiveness in the Church .....	237
Christian Ethics for Forgiveness Education in the Church.....	239
Forgiveness Education in the Church .....	249
Summary of the Dissertation.....	257
Future Research.....	261
Conclusion .....	261
REFERENCE LIST .....	263



## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ABD</i>	D. N. Freedman, ed., <i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
<i>BDAG</i>	W. Bauer, & F. W. Danker, ed., <i>A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature</i>
<i>BDB</i>	F. Brown, S. R. Driver & C. A. Briggs, ed., <i>Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English lexicon</i>
<i>EDBT</i>	W. A. Elwell, ed., <i>Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology</i>
<i>NIDB</i>	K. D. Sakenfeld, ed., <i>New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
<i>ISBE</i>	Orr, J. <i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>
<i>LXX</i>	Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures

## PREFACE

I thank God for faithfully leading me and helping me to write this dissertation. I also thank Dr. Eric Johnson, who has given me so much help in many different ways as my supervisor. If it were not for his patience and wisdom, I would have not been able to reach this point. I want to repay this great grace I received from him by being a better follower of Jesus, and being a wonderful teacher or mentor to many. My thanks also go to Dr. Gregg Allison. The warm and loving care he has shown me has made Southern Seminary into a place where I was able to feel God's love and the life of the Holy Spirit. In addition, meeting Dr. Robert Cheong has been God's tremendous grace because Dr. Cheong has studied in depth on Christian forgiveness, so his writings have given me so much help.

I am very much aware that the completion of this work would not have been possible without the help and support of many others. I want to dedicate this work to family and friends who have prayed for me and supported me financially. Most of them were poorer than others, but they love Jesus than anybody else. This very fact has given me the strength to fight and have victory over sin, and has led me to revere God, staying in His presence.

The two people I thought about the most as I was reaching the end of this work were my father, who passed away while I was in the Ph.D program, and my mother, who is in Korea. The love and sacrifice they have shown me will be a great inheritance all my life. My father was one of the most supportive people for my Ph.D studies, and I am happy because I feel like he is smiling at me as he watches me in heaven. Thank you,

father.

However, above all, I thank my Father God, who gave me this dream to study abroad one spring day, and has faithfully led me in this path. Most of the time, it was pleasant, like a picnic in the spring, but there were also times when it was hard and fearsome. I came all this way following my Lord. I pray that in this continuing journey, I will come to love Him more and revere Him all the days of my life.

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May 2017

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The therapeutic effects of forgiveness are currently attracting a lot of attention, not only from Christian counselors, but also from secular counselors and researchers (Frise & McMinn, 2010; Cheong, 2005; McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2001)<sup>1</sup>. The client who fails to forgive her offender experiences a high level of stress that threatens her spiritual, ethical, psychosocial, and biological health. Conversely, forgiveness can facilitate the client's wellbeing in all aspects of life, creating a social ripple effect by generating empathy in those who observe the forgiveness taking place (McCullough et al., 2001; Helmick & Petersen, 2001; Worthington, 1998, 2006; Enright & North, 1998). Scientific research on the psychology of human forgiveness began in earnest in the 1980s and now seems to be at its zenith (Cheong, 2005; Frise & McMinn, 2010). Today more and more Christian and secular counselors tend to be adopting forgiveness as an effective therapeutic process. Christian researchers have done valuable empirical research on forgiveness and have developed effective forgiveness models. Robert D. Enright has long studied a psychology of forgiveness and Everett Worthington has written much on forgiveness as empathy-based treatment. Psychologist Richard

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<sup>1</sup> More and more researches on human forgiveness started to appear since the late 20th century, and now various studies about forgiveness such as forgiveness as a way of conflict resolution in the marital relationship (Fincham, Beach & Davila, 2004; Fincham, Hall, & Beach, 2006), forgiveness therapy of the victims (Hebl & Enright, 1993; Lin, Mack, Enright, Krahn, & Baskin, 2004), and forgiveness-education (Luskin, Ginzburg, & Thoresen, 2005; Tibbits, Piromalli, Luskin, & Ellis, 2006) are being conducted.

Fitzgibbons compares Enright and his colleagues' research on forgiveness to "the discovery of sulfa drugs and penicillin" for physical diseases because of its critical therapeutic effects on mental disorders (Enright & North, 1998, p. 71). This increasing interest in the topic of forgiveness is truly encouraging to Christians, because forgiveness is at the center of the biblical message. According to the Bible, Jesus came into the world to forgive sinners (Heb 10:12) and Christians who receive God's forgiveness are commended to forgive others, as God forgives them (Col 3:13; Eph 4:32; Mark 11:25; Matt 6:12; 18:33-35). Christians are called to be proficient forgivers. However, even among Christians, there is no agreement on the concept and application of forgiveness. For example, Jay Adams (1989), Donald Whitney (2002), and Chris Brauns (2008) believe that the biblical concept of human forgiveness is conditional, because divine forgiveness is given only to the repentant, but most scholars assert that it is unconditional (Allender & Longman, 1992; Enright, 2001; Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Worthington, 2006; Jones, 1995; Jeffress, 2000; Shults & Sandage, 2003; Smedes, 1984). Some focus on the victims' subjective or intrapersonal forgiveness rather than engagement with their wrongdoers (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Smedes, 1996; Worthington, 2003). Others believe that biblical forgiveness should be understood as relational or interpersonal, resulting in reconciliation rather than a more privatized action (Jones, 1995; Bash, 2007; MacArthur, 2009; Carson, 2002).

At first, it appears that these different perspectives on biblical forgiveness are all supported by Scripture, leading to confusion among Christians when the same texts are used to support conflicting positions. For example, in Luke 23:34, Jesus says on the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." Those who take the unconditional forgiveness position believe that Jesus forgave the Roman soldiers who were unrepentant at that time (Worthington, 2009). As Carson (2002) points out, "the prayer is often used as a kind of generalized incentive to Christians to forgive everyone under every circumstance" (p.77). By contrast, those who maintain the conditional

forgiveness position argue that Jesus did not forgive unrepentant soldiers, but simply prayed that the Father would forgive them (Adams, 1989; Whitney, 2001; MacArthur, 2009). In spite of such disagreement on biblical forgiveness, both sides attempt to understand Christian forgiveness on the basis of the biblical text. While it may be that both sides put forth incomplete arguments, together they help Christians form a more comprehensive model of biblical forgiveness.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this dissertation is to propose such a comprehensive model of biblical forgiveness by interpreting biblical passages on forgiveness, integrating the various valid interpretations, and diachronically inspecting the concept through a redemptive-historical lens. Viewing the topic from a synchronic perspective, rather than a diachronic will show that the revelation of sin, covenant, redemption and law have been organically and progressively developed through biblical history in the context of the meta-narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. Geerhardus Vos (1975) emphasizes that every revelation of redemption bears “an organic character,” and so it grows progressively from seed-form to full-grown tree-form (p. 7). Thus, revelation is not uniform, but multiform, because “the truth is inherently rich and complex, because God is so Himself” (Vos, 1975, p. 8). Kaiser (1991), agreeing with Vos, states,

It must be strictly observed, however, that while there is development and succession from the beginning to the end of revelation there is also perfection of revealed truth at all stages in the process, even though that perfection often may only be a perfection in seminal form with an incipient potentiality for increasing clearness and fullness in the progress of revelation and history. (p. 61)

Thus, in organic and progressive development, the first form and the last form have the same nature, but a different configuration of elements. In the same way, the theme of forgiveness, as an important theme of redemptive history, also shows progressive development through different contexts in biblical history up until the coming of Jesus Christ, to whom all biblical revelation points. The development of this redemptive view

of forgiveness can be imagined as a spiral form in which the outermost circle is the final form that fulfills all past forms, leading to a comprehensive and multiform concept of biblical forgiveness that hopefully avoids a reductionist understanding of forgiveness.

### **Thesis**

The argument of this dissertation is that the revelation of forgiveness in the Bible has developed through redemptive history with shifts in emphasis (1) from divine to human forgiveness, (2) from a conditional to an unconditional offer of forgiveness, (3) from justice-focused to love-focused forgiveness, and (4) from the offender's responsibility to repent to the victim's willingness to forgive, until divine forgiveness is finally revealed in the new covenant era to consist of the *unconditional offer* of forgiveness (Rom 5:6-11) and the *conditional attainment* of forgiveness and reconciliation after repentance (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:30-31), which thereby becomes the prototype of Christian human forgiveness.

A redemptive-historical view reveals diverse forms of forgiveness according to different contexts; divine forgiveness, which refers to God's forgiveness of sinners and human forgiveness, which refers to a human victim's forgiveness of a perpetrator. Divine forgiveness was revealed in seed-form immediately following Adam's first sin (Gen 3:15) and has developed into a full-grown tree for God's people who are now under the new covenant. Although the first revelation of divine forgiveness was not given to Adam and Eve as a detailed and fully-elaborated model, it was fundamentally the same as the divine forgiveness that was later revealed through Christ in the New Testament [NT]. For example, God's symbolic forgiveness of Adam and Eve revealed in his provision of garments made of animal's skin (Gen 3:21) points to the forgiveness offered through the sacrificial offering of a lamb under the Sinai covenant, which is personified as the suffering servant by Isaiah (53:7, 12), and is clearly identified as Jesus Christ in the NT (John 1:29) (Kimble, 2002). Because biblical forgiveness—both divine and human—is

built upon the revelation of each prior stage, its development should not be overlooked or reduced to the form of only one of the stages. As a result, a redemptive-historical view gives a comprehensive and ultimately coherent view of divine and human forgiveness in the Bible.

A first development in redemptive history is the scope of forgiveness in the Bible, which progresses from divine forgiveness to human forgiveness. Although some biblical narratives of interpersonal forgiveness, such as Joseph and his brothers and Jacob and Esau, imply the existence of human forgiveness, the Old Testament [OT] is almost exclusively focused on divine forgiveness toward the nation of Israel and does not offer clear instruction about human forgiveness (Griswold & Konstan, 2012; Konstan, 2010; Schimmel, 2002; Bash, 2007, 2011; Jones, 1995; Redlich, 1937; Rezetko, Lim, & Aucker, 2006; Owen, 1996b). This is because in the OT era, God wanted to reveal that forgiveness belongs ultimately only to God through rituals, which foreshadowed atonement through Christ (Owen, 1966b). Konstan (2010) also argues that the main focus of the OT is the vertical relationship between God and his people, and so the grand offense is that God's people abandoned their covenant with him through idolatry. Interpersonal forgiveness was not required of the people of Israel as a virtue (Redlich, 1937; Barton & Reimer, 1996; Owen, 1966b). Instead, the OT writers focused on the joy of receiving God's forgiveness (Pss 32; 103; 130; 51; Job 33:28), which was primarily limited to Israel at that time (Wright, 1997), except in a few cases where people outside of Israel were forgiven by God, such as Job (Job 42:1-9) or the Ninevites (Jonah 3:10).

While the Pentateuch does not mention human forgiveness, it was in the age of the prophets that a more explicit foundation was being laid for the development of human forgiveness. Unlike their predecessors, who focused exclusively on Israel's vertical relationship with God, the prophets showed strong interest in the moral responsibility of individuals in human relationships. For the prophets, God's forgiveness is based on a sinner's righteous life in relation to both God and other people, and not so much on



rituals themselves (Hos 6:1-6; Isa 1:11-18; 55:7; Amos 5:3-24). Finally, teaching on human forgiveness appeared in Second Temple literature such as the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha (Redlich, 1937).

However, the concept of human forgiveness in the intertestamental age was transitional and was not revealed in its full scope until the NT (Redlich, 1937; Bash, 2013). Jesus' teaching on human forgiveness is consistent with earlier Jewish literature focusing on repentance (Matt 3:2; 5:23-24; 18:15-17; Luke 17:3) and at the same time is radically expanded by his commandment to love not only one's brothers, but enemies and Gentiles as well (John 13:34-35; Matt 5:43-48). Although the concept of interpersonal forgiveness existed in various forms in the Greek and Jewish world before Jesus and in other cultures as well (Griswold, 2007; Konstan, 2010), and, even though the human forgiveness of Jesus likens that of the intertestamental age (Barton & Reimer, 1996), "Jesus holds the pivotal place in the development of forgiveness in Western thought, culture and ethics" (Bash, 2013, p. 396). Thus, Jesus and the NT writers seem to be the very first to teach radical interpersonal forgiveness as a critical Christian marker or habitual virtue, rooted in grace, and spoke about it quite often (Arendt, 1958; Bash, 2013). This overview, thus, shows that in redemptive history the scope of biblical forgiveness extended gradually from divine forgiveness to human forgiveness.

Second, both divine and human forgiveness developed in redemptive history from a conditional offer of forgiveness following a sinner's act of atonement or repentance in the OT to an unconditional offer of forgiveness prior to the offender's repentance (see Rom 5:8; Mark 11:25). Also, the condition of God's forgiveness shifted from requiring repentance of the offender to the victim's duty to forgive others given in the command to love one's enemy (Matt 5:43-48; 6:14-15; 18:33-35; Mark 11:25). The OT consistently shows that neither divine nor human forgiveness is given without the offender's repentance and restitution (Jones, 1995; Konstan, 2010; Bash, 2007; 2011). Because both are conditionally extended, an emphasis appears to be placed on justice.

When one sinned against another, the OT law required that the offender first compensate the harmed party, sacrifice an atoning animal through the priest, and then receive divine forgiveness from God (Lev 6:1-7). Thus, it seems as if God taught Israel that in order to be forgiven by God, one must be forgiven by “one’s neighbor,” thereby altogether satisfying some degree of justice as a precondition of divine forgiveness. By contrast, the NT concentrates attention on love and forgiveness relatively more than on justice and repentance in the context of divine and human forgiveness (Luke 7:47; John 3:16-17; 2 Cor 2:7-8; 1 John 4:10; Rom 5:8; 1 Pet 4:8). The standards of love and forgiveness in the Old Covenant are extended and strengthened in the New Covenant era (Cheong & DiBlasio, 2007). In the NT, divine forgiveness is shown to have been prepared by God and offered to human beings before they repent (Rom 5:8-11). Also, on numerous occasions the NT advocates unconditional human forgiveness (Mark 11:25, Luke 11:4; Matt 6:12) (MacArthur, 2009). The NT emphasizes the victim’s role in forgiving the offender on the basis of the commandment to love one’s enemy, which is grounded in divine love and forgiveness (Rom 5:8), more than the role of the offender in pursuing repentance. For example, Jesus says that if people do not forgive others, God will not forgive them either (Matt 6:14-15, 18:35). So it seems that Israel was forgiven on the condition of repentance, whereas the Church is now required to not only repent, but also to forgive (Redlich, 1937; Barton & Reimer, 1996).

Third, a redemptive-historical approach to forgiveness in the Bible requires Christians to revisit the issue of conditional and unconditional divine forgiveness. Divine forgiveness today has been secured through two different stages divided by an increasingly long time gap in-between: first, God’s unconditional offer of forgiveness through Jesus’ atonement; and second, God’s conditional grant of actual forgiveness upon the sinner’s repentance and faith in Christ. As a result, divine forgiveness through Christ has both conditional and unconditional elements and both stages must be regarded together. I will offer a new model of divine forgiveness based on Scriptural revelation by

focusing on what is required of the two parties—the offended and the offender—rather than on the two different stages. This model of divine forgiveness consists of the unconditional offer of forgiveness (Rom 5:6-11) by the offended and the conditional attainment of forgiveness and reconciliation after the offender’s repentance (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:30-31). Christian Godlike human forgiveness in the NT (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13) should follow this same pattern: an unconditional grant of forgiveness (Mark 11:25) and conditional attainment of forgiveness and reconciliation through repentance (Matt 18:15-17; Luke 17:3-4).

Therefore, this redemptive-historical approach recognizes that biblical forgiveness has developed progressively over time. Because “the organic nature of progressive revelation ensures its perfection and saving sufficiency at every stage,” each stage of revelation should be examined in light of the whole progression rather than being considered in isolation (Kimble, 2002, p. 9). Considering this orientation, this dissertation will examine the Bible, theology, Jewish traditions and the psychology of forgiveness.

### **Methodology and Organization of Research**

This dissertation is comprised of four chapters: an introduction, a chapter on the development of forgiveness in the OT and intertestamental period, another on forgiveness in the NT, and the last on implications of the progressive development of biblical forgiveness for Christian faith and life.

The present chapter introduces the reader to the thesis and definition of terms related to forgiveness and provides a brief, general survey of biblical forgiveness. Difficulty in forgiving can be related to erroneous notions of what it means to forgive (Cunningham, 1985; Worthington, 2006). The main purpose of this section is to establish a true understanding of divine forgiveness amidst divergent views in the field by focusing on key issues such as its definition, purpose, motive, and ideal model. Because human beings are God’s image-bearers, it follows that human forgiveness should generally

reflect God's forgiveness (Col 3:13; Mark 11:25; Matt 18:33, Luke 6:36-37).

The second chapter will focus on divine forgiveness and human forgiveness in the OT and intertestamental eras. Because the OT canon was given in the context of God's personal relationship with the nation of Israel, it is a story of relationship (Kessler, 2013). This relationship is a good starting point for understanding the revelation of God's forgiveness in the OT (Anderson & Bishop, 1999). Thus, in the second chapter I will examine how the concept of God's forgiveness has been developed through the various stages of this relational history: from creation to the patriarchal era, the Mosaic era, the monarchical era, and the intertestamental era. The story of the relationship between God and his people involves a crisis with humanity's fall into sin, the origin of humanity's need for forgiveness. After Adam's fall, humans became alienated from God, and developed increasing depravity, and their life-span was shortened. The increased intensity of sin, described in Genesis 3-11, also implied a progressive alienation from God and humanity's increased need for a sense of guilt and for God's forgiveness. These aspects, caused by the fall, led to the need of a written law, which was given through Moses. Because of the fall into sin, holiness and obedience to God on the basis of law became an emphasis for Israel's history (Kaiser, 1991). Divine forgiveness was especially developed in the intertestamental period, because of an emphasis on the personal repentance of sinners promoted through the experience of exile (Boda & Smith, 2006). However, at this time in history, God's forgiveness was still directed at the nation of Israel.

In the second part of chapter 2, OT narratives on human forgiveness will be examined. These narratives will highlight the offender's action of repentance as the necessary precondition of human forgiveness as well as humanity's sinful unwillingness to admit and repent of sins. The introduction of the guilt offering as a way of atonement with God will give some insight into the analogy between the offended God and the offended human. The conception of human forgiveness in the Jewish literature of the Intertestamental period, such as the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, will also be

examined. Although the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha are not canonical, they are very important for understanding the movement of biblical forgiveness since these texts contributed to the cultural context in which Jesus lived and in which early Christianity arose.

The third chapter will examine divine forgiveness and human forgiveness in the NT. God's forgiveness was developed to the fullest extent in Jesus, who is the embodiment of divine forgiveness, and was later elaborated by his apostles. First and foremost, the continuity and discontinuity between atonement in the OT and in the NT will be examined to find the radical characteristics of divine forgiveness in the NT. Also Jesus' life will be put forward as the perfect model of both divine and human forgiveness. This chapter will also explore how the concept of indwelling sin in the NT is radically developed from the outward-focused concept of sin in the OT. This inward-focused concept of sin cannot but be related with the concept of divine forgiveness in the NT, which transforms the soul of the recipient of God's forgiveness into a Godlike forgiver (Bulkeley, 2005; Emerson, 1964; Piper, 2012; Best, 1985). Similarly, the apostle Paul describes Christian human forgiveness as a Christian attribute developed through sanctification in which a believer is conformed to the image of God (Col 3: 10, 13; Eph 4:32, 5:1). Further, the third chapter will focus on the need to establish a model of Christian human forgiveness that reflects the final revelation of God's forgiveness in the NT, which includes some instructions about the offender's repentance or apology (Matt 5:23-25; Luke 12:58-59) as well as some explicit examples of interpersonal forgiveness (Matt 6:12-15; 18:22, 33, 35; Mark 11:25; Luke 6:37; 17:3-4; Eph 4:32; Col 3:13) (Nolland, 1993; Barton & Reimer, 1996).

In the fourth chapter, a Christian psychological model of biblical human forgiveness will be developed in light of the foregoing discussions as well as empirical research on the topic of forgiveness. After exploring basic principles of Christian human forgiveness, scientific research on human forgiveness, such as dynamics, reasons of

unforgiveness, models of forgiveness, and the psychological process of forgiveness will be examined as valuable sources of creation grace that contribute to a comprehensive model of human forgiveness. Because of the similarities and differences between divine and human forgiveness, it is important not only to survey divine forgiveness, which is special grace, but also scientific research on human forgiveness in order to understand the Christian doctrine of human forgiveness. For example, research shows that there are some personality traits that lead to unforgiveness (Worthington, 1998). This information would be very helpful for Christian soul-care givers to understand their victim's relative ability to forgive. Watts and Gulliford (2004) state that "as a result of the therapeutic forgiveness movement, our understanding of the process of forgiveness is probably now clearer and sharper than at any previous time in Christian history" (p. 5). However, psychological resources on forgiveness, however, are never the foundation or end for Christians. Because of the antithesis between secular and Christian worldviews, biblical truth about forgiveness forms the ultimate guide (Carson, 2002).

In the final chapter of this dissertation, suggestions were made as to how Christians can practice forgiveness in the church as the beneficiaries of the final and completed revelation. The principles of biblical forgiveness were applied to ideas for educating Christians to enable the church to grow into a forgiven and forgiving community. Ideas for future research regarding forgiveness are, next, put forward for consideration, before concluding this dissertation.

### **Major Issues Regarding Divine and Human Forgiveness**

Before exploring the concepts of divine and human forgiveness in the Bible, it is important to understand that there are some associated issues upon which Christians fail to agree. First and foremost are the varied definitions of human forgiveness among both Christian and non-Christian scholars.

## **Disagreement regarding the Definition of Human Forgiveness**

In spite of a wide range of research on forgiveness, the definition of human forgiveness remains varied. McCullough observes that “the many definitions of forgiveness that have been proposed share some similarities, but are different in some substantial ways” (McCullough et al., 2001, p. 8). However, apart from their differences on what forgiveness is, many psychologists and theologians seem to agree on what forgiveness is not by differentiating forgiveness from condoning, ignoring, or forgetting the wrongdoing (Shults & Sandage, 2003; McCullough et al., 2001; Bash, 2015). McKnight (2004) states that “forgiveness is a quintessentially moral issue, but the debate over it is bedeviled by clumsy definitions, confusing categories, and contextual dislocations” (p. 36).

For example, Joseph Butler (2012), Murphy and Hampton (1988) and McGary (1989) define forgiveness similarly as the victim’s forswearing of resentment. This concept of forgiveness may distort the meaning of forgiveness by reducing forgiveness to a victim’s unilateral psychological change of overcoming anger over an offence (Murphy & Hampton, 1988; Worthington, 1998). Volf (2006a) writes about the distinctness of Christian forgiveness: “Fundamentally, forgiveness is not about saying something, not even about putting something into effect by speaking. It’s about doing something. When God forgave, he “put forward” Jesus Christ as a sacrifice of atonement. . . . Forgiveness takes place through Christ’s death” (p. 144). Thus, Christian forgiveness should not be defined simply as emotional release from negative affect. Rather, it is an activity that engages the emotional, cognitive, social, and moral aspects of the whole person.

Others have defined forgiveness as interpersonal restoration of relationships. For example, Augsburgers states in the *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology* that “forgiveness is the mutual recognition that repentance of either or both parties is genuine and that right relationships have been restored or achieved” (Atkinson,

Field, Holmes, & O'Donovan, 1995, p. 389). However, this definition seems to better fit the concept of reconciliation, which is always bilateral.

Enright believes that grasping a right concept of forgiveness is so crucial to his forgiveness therapy that he spends significant time educating clients on the matter (Worthington, 1998; Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). Even though most scholars have admitted the necessity and advantages of a common definition of forgiveness, there is still no consensus (Macaskill, 2005). McCullough and his colleagues have made an attempt to incorporate the emotional, social, and behavioral aspects in their definition of forgiveness as an “intraindividual, prosocial change toward a perceived transgressor that is situated within a specific interpersonal context” (McCullough et al., 2001, p. 9). For Enright and Coyle, forgiveness is “a willingness to abandon one’s right to resentment, negative judgment and indifferent behavior toward one who unjustly hurt us, while fostering the undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity and even love toward him or her” (as cited in Worthington, 1998, p. 140). This definition of forgiveness by Enright and Coyle seems to be comprehensive by incorporating psychological, cognitive, and behavioral change into the victim’s relationship with the offender.

However, even these comprehensive definitions do not seem to be sufficient to define biblical human forgiveness in which the concept of sin is of central importance. Moreover, biblical human forgiveness should somehow reflect and be related to divine forgiveness (Col 3:13; Eph 4:32; Mark 11:25; Matt 6:12; 18:33-35). Thus, biblical human forgiveness cannot be understood outside of divine forgiveness through Jesus Christ who atoned for sin through his death and accomplished the objective work of and foundation for the forgiveness of sin. Therefore, to define biblical human forgiveness one should explore the biblical meaning of divine forgiveness as the archetype of human forgiveness.

### **The Analogy of Divine and Human Forgiveness**

The simple answer to the question of how Christians should forgive others is



that they are to imitate God's forgiveness through Christ: "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" (Eph 4:32), and "bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you" (Col 3:13). In these verses, *καθὼς* ("just as") conveys comparison, which is further emphasized when used with *καί* ("also"), and so *καθὼς καί* refers to "the conformity pattern" (Lincoln, 1990, p. 308). So, the most fundamental proposition of Christian human forgiveness is that Christians should forgive their offenders according to the same pattern in which God forgives them. In other words, to grasp human forgiveness, Christians should understand divine forgiveness, first. However, although most Christians agree on this analogy of divine and human forgiveness in the Bible, even among evangelical Christians, there is no agreement on the concept and application of Christian human forgiveness. In other words, Christians do not agree on how to imitate God's forgiveness. Among the disagreements, the problem of conditionality would be one of the most important issues.

### **The Issue of Conditionality**

Generally, conditional forgiveness is understood as forgiveness that is granted to the offender after the condition of repentance has been met. Alternately, unconditional forgiveness denotes forgiveness granted without the offender's repentance. Based on the proposition of analogy between divine and human forgiveness in Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:13, among evangelicals, some theologians such as Murray (1976b), Adams (1989), Whitney (2002), Brauns (2008), Lewis (2012), Moberly (1901) Bash (2007; 2011; 2015), Sande (2004), and Murphy (2004), emphasize the importance of justice and repentance in divine forgiveness and that human forgiveness should be conditionally granted only to the repentant offender. Those who hold to the repentance-conditional view of forgiveness believe that just as God forgives only repentant sinners, so Christians should forgive only those who repent. They focus on Matthew 18:15-20 and Luke 17:3-4,

which speak about human forgiveness in response to an offender's repentance. Adams (1989) believes that "forgiveness is conditioned on the offender's willingness to confess sin and to seek forgiveness" (p. 40) and states the following:

It should go without saying that since our forgiveness is modeled after God's (Eph 4:32), it must be conditional. Forgiveness by God rests on clear, unmistakable conditions. The apostles did not merely announce that God had forgiven men, who should acknowledge and rejoice in the fact but, rather, they were sent forth to preach "repentance and the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 24:47; Acts 17:30). The sins of those who repented and trusted in the Saviour as the one who shed His blood for them were forgiven on the conditions of repentance and faith. Paul and the apostles turned away from those who refused to meet the conditions, just as John and Jesus did earlier when the scribes and the Pharisees would not repent. (p. 38)

Lewis (2012) also argues that "since we are to be imitators of God and forgive in the same way God forgives, we would expect the Scriptures to be consistent, stating that the condition of repentance is required to be fulfilled before believers are required to forgive each other's sins" (<http://www.itlnet.org>). The main concern of the scholars who hold to the repentance-conditional view regarding unconditional forgiveness is that it suggests that everyone, including the unrepentant, is forgiven by God, which is the essence of universalism. Brauns (2012) states the following:

Universalism is the teaching that all are saved regardless of whether or not they believe in Christ. Clearly, it is an un-biblical doctrine (John 3:36). Yet, given that the first principle of forgiveness is that we are to forgive others as God forgave us (Ephesians 4:32), it is a small step from saying that everyone forgives everyone unconditionally, to saying that God forgives everyone unconditionally. What we believe about interpersonal forgiveness is often read back into the doctrine of salvation. (<http://chrisbrauns.com>)

Another strong point of the repentance-condition view of forgiveness is its emphasis on reconciliation as the purpose of forgiveness. As we will see later in this chapter, they hold that forgiveness is not an end in and of itself, but a means toward reconciliation of a broken relationship. In this respect, conditional forgiveness underscores mutuality, because only the repentant offender can receive forgiveness from the offended, thereby naturally making reconciliation a mutual activity as well. Adams (1989) states,

Where there is no repentance, increasingly larger efforts must be made to bring it

about. The matter cannot be dropped simply by saying, “I forgive you, whether you repent or not.” God is not interested in forgiveness as an end in itself, or as a therapeutic technique that benefits the one doing the forgiving. He wants reconciliation to take place, and that can only be brought about by repentance. (pp. 37-38)

Thus, the strengths of the conditional forgiveness view are the consistency it maintains between divine and human forgiveness and its emphasis on reconciliation as the purpose of forgiveness. On the other hand, the concept of conditional forgiveness prevents Christian victims from forgiving until their offenders repent. It, therefore, makes the victim’s act of forgiveness dependent on the attitude or decision of the offender.

MacArthur (2009) describes the problems with this kind of conditional forgiveness as follows:

Sadly, I have seen people who hold this opinion become obsessive confronters and ultimately make themselves odious to friend and foe alike. Others nurse grudges, refuse to relinquish bitterness, and even sever friendships over relatively petty offenses, justifying such attitudes because they are convinced they have no duty to forgive until the offender repents. (p. 119)

As a result, the victim’s personal agency, which is initially harmed by the wrongdoing of her offender, is somewhat compromised again by holding her hostage to the action or inaction of the offender.

In contrast, most Christian scholars believe that human forgiveness can be given unconditionally to an offender (Enright, 2001; Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Jones, 1995; Shults & Sandage, 2003; Semedes, 1984; Carson, 2002; Worthington, 2003, 2006; Stanley, 1987; Volf, 2006a; Owen, 1966b; Baxter, 2000). They tend to focus on God’s unconditional grace which is revealed in Christ’s atonement rather than the sinner’s response of repentance in divine forgiveness, emphasize the role of the offended party as a personal agent, who is able to offer forgiveness apart from the attitude of the offender, and differentiate unilateral forgiveness from bilateral reconciliation. For example, Miroslav Volf (2006a), although he believes that a sinner cannot be forgiven by God without repentance, emphasizes God’s unconditional provision of Jesus’ atonement and so argues Christians should forgive their offender unconditionally:

To forgive means, first, not to press charges against the wrongdoer. That's what God has done for sinful humanity. The story of Christ's death tells us that God doesn't press charges against humanity. Instead, on account of Christ's unity with God, Jesus Christ bears human sin. No punishment will fall on us. The divine Judge was judged in our place. We are free of the charge. That's also what we do when we forgive: We forgo the demand for retribution. (p. 169)

Holloway (2002) also argues that true human forgiveness should be unconditional, because divine forgiveness is unconditionally granted before the sinner's repentance and even serves as the cause of a sinner's repentance. Likewise, when Christians focus only on the first stage of God's forgiveness, Jesus' atonement, they can label God's forgiveness as free, gracious, and unconditional.

However, many of the evangelical scholars that take this position on unconditional human forgiveness recognize that their views on divine and human forgiveness are not consistent; many of them believe that divine forgiveness is conditional because it is granted to only the repentant sinner, but human forgiveness is unconditional. They explain this inconsistency by pointing to the infinite difference between God and humanity. For example, Worthington (2009) states,

Within the scriptures, interpersonal forgiveness is unconditional, whereas divine forgiveness is conditional. Divine forgiveness is based on divine truth, justice, mercy, and love, which are granted from an omniscient, merciful and just God. Because God knows people's hearts, God can condition divine forgiveness on a person's repentance. But humans are called to forgive unconditionally . . . because we are finite (i.e., we cannot know the heart, minds, or intentions of the transgressors). Humans are morally corrupt and thus are moral equals, in no position to judge each other. (p. 48)

For Worthington, the difference between conditional divine forgiveness and unconditional human forgiveness is based on the fact that God is omniscient and humans are not. In fact, in the Bible God did not forgive people with rebellious hearts (Deut 29:19-20; cf. Jer 18:23; 2 Chr 6:30). In this respect, Worthington's view that God forgives conditionally because of his perfect knowledge of humanity is somewhat persuasive. However, there is some disagreement about how this insight should be applied to human forgiveness. While Worthington argues that human beings should forgive unconditionally because they do not know the state of the offender's heart

omnisciently, it can also be argued that human beings can reflect God analogically by extending forgiveness only to the offender who demonstrates explicit repentance. As mediators of divine forgiveness, Israel's priests required an atoning ritual (Lev 5:5-6; 16:21-22) and John the Baptist called for baptism (Mark 1:4-5; Matt 3:6-10) as obvious signs of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. In this way, limited human knowledge can be a strong reason for conditional forgiveness. Furthermore, the Bible shows that human beings receive God's forgiveness on the condition of repentance (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:30-31) and faith (Mark 16:16; Acts 10:43; Rom 3:23-28; Gal 2:16), not on the condition of God's omniscience. This also would seem to contradict the biblical truth that human forgiveness should be a reflection of divine forgiveness.

Kim and Enright (2015) agree that human and divine forgiveness differ in their conditionality, but provide a different explanation. They argue, somewhat confusingly, that divine forgiveness is conditional and includes reconciliation, because it is given only to repentant sinners and so naturally results in reconciliation between God and the repentant person whose sin is covered by Jesus' blood. On the other hand, because human forgiveness cannot cancel sin and so cannot naturally include reconciliation, it can happen unconditionally, independently of the offender's repentance and apart from reconciliation. While this perspective succeeds in avoiding universalistic views of salvation and encouraging unconditional human forgiveness, it does not seem to be congruent with the biblical teaching that human forgiveness should imitate divine forgiveness.

Further, in Chapter three we will examine the ways in which Paul shows how human forgiveness reflects God's forgiveness in Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:13. Because the question of conditionality is foundational to one's definition of forgiveness, we will start by exploring what different Christian authors have said about this issue.

## **Differentiating God's Offer and the Sinner's Acceptance of God's Forgiveness**

The present focus of the debate on conditional or unconditional divine forgiveness is on whether the offender receives forgiveness conditionally or unconditionally on the basis of repentance. Disagreements seem to center on the stance the sinner takes in order to receive forgiveness. Further, both conditional and unconditional forgiveness perspectives seem to presuppose that the offering and receiving of divine forgiveness are connected so closely that they happen almost simultaneously. For example, in Brauns' statement quote above (p. 14), 'God forgives everyone' seems to be understood as 'everyone is forgiven by God'. However, although God offers forgiveness to everyone, there can be some who reject his offer (Matt 22:1-14). Thus, we need to look into the biblical teaching on the process and timing of the giving and receiving of forgiveness for clarity on this issue.

When we examine the process of how God's forgiveness through Christ's atonement is bestowed, two stages can be identified. Let us imagine that a man named Joe becomes a Christian by receiving divine forgiveness through repentance and faith in Christ's atonement. The divine forgiveness that Joe receives had already been made possible and offered to the world two thousand years ago up to the present, but is applied or granted to Joe at the moment of his conversion (Erickson, 2013; Owen, 1966b; Baxter, 2000). In this way, we see that there is a time gap between God's ongoing offer of forgiveness in history and Joe's acceptance of that forgiveness at a particular point in time. Charnock (1985) explains further,

This union is made by faith, and upon this account we are said to be justified by faith. This is our willingness to receive Christ upon the terms he is offered. Since a mediator is not a mediator of one, but supposeth in the notion of it two parties, there must be a consent on both sides. God's consent is manifested by giving, our consent is by receiving, which is a title given to faith, John 1:12; God's consent is appointing and accepting the atonement, and ours in receiving the atonement, which is all one with 'receiving forgiveness of sin,' Rom. 5:11. (p. 521)

Clarity about the roles and timeline in which forgiveness is offered and received aids our

understanding of divine forgiveness.

### **The Two Stages of Divine Forgiveness**

Referring back to the earlier example, there are two events required for Joe to secure divine forgiveness: first, God's offer of divine forgiveness through Jesus' atonement and, second, God's application of divine forgiveness to Joe because of his faith and repentance. Joe can only receive divine forgiveness through repentance.

First, the former stage of atonement has already been fulfilled by God himself before Joe believes and repents (Rom 5:8) and is offered freely to all people through announcing the gospel (Eph 2:8-9; 1 Tim 2:6; 1 John 2:2). So, Jesus' atonement can be described as the condition of the divine fulfillment. Paul emphasizes in Romans 5:6-11 that Jesus has already accomplished a perfect atonement, which is the objective foundation of forgiveness, even before human offenders request forgiveness with repentance (Soderlund & Wright, 1999). "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). In other words, Christ's extraordinary work of atonement, needed to forgive the undeserving, is initiated at God's appointed time and accomplished only by the sovereign God himself as a personal agent, apart from any act of the offender. Thus, the offer of divine forgiveness, which is conditioned upon Jesus' atonement, has no human conditions (Rom 5:6-11). However, this unconditional offer of divine forgiveness does not result in forgiveness being granted unless humans respond to it. If God's forgiveness were given to everybody unilaterally, it would mean that everyone would be saved, which is contrary to the teaching of Scripture. So, the forgiveness that Christ made available is merely potential and not actual prior to personal faith and repentance.

Second, although divine forgiveness through Jesus' atoning work is offered freely, it is realized and obtained only where there is active receptivity through faith and repentance of a sinner. Without the latter condition of the sinner's response of repentance

and faith, divine forgiveness cannot be applied to an individual (Charnock, 1985; Owen, 1966b). Both in the OT and NT, sinners can receive forgiveness only when they seek divine forgiveness and repent genuinely from the heart (2 Chr 6:26-27; 7:14; Joel 2:12; Jer 3:22-25; 18:11-12; 36:3 Ezek 33:11-16; Isa 55:6-7; Joel 2:12-13; Hos 14:1-4; and Matt 3:2, 8; 4:17; Luke 3:3; 5:32; 13:3; Acts 8:22; 26:20). However, the sinner's repentance is not a causative condition of divine forgiveness. Even in the OT where repentance was a prerequisite, divine forgiveness is about God's just and forgiving character (Exod 34:7); it does not depend on the sinner, but on God's sovereign decision. In this respect, Balthasar (1984) states that "God forgives through free grace and not on the basis of acts of penance, but . . . this forgiveness cannot become effective unless there is an expiatory conversion of the person" (p. 322). Thus, rather than being causative, repentance is a necessary receptive condition of God's forgiveness (Beach, 2015).

As a result, the Bible clearly teaches that Jesus' atonement is an indispensable divine condition for the forgiveness of sin (Heb 9:22; Rom 5:8) (Murray, 1976a; Stott, 2006) and humans cannot obtain forgiveness without repentance. However, when we focus on the role of Christ's atonement in divine forgiveness, we conclude that God's forgiveness has no human conditions, whereas when we focus on the necessity for faith and repentance, we conclude that it is conditional.

### **The Need for a New Model of Divine Forgiveness**

Unlike contemporary evangelical scholars, many Christian writers throughout history have focused more on the condition of God's provision of atonement than on that of human repentance, resulting in the presumption that divine forgiveness is unconditional or free. For instance, although J. C. Ryle (2003) believes strongly in the need for repentance and faith as conditions of securing divine forgiveness, he speaks of divine forgiveness as unconditional:

Furthermore, it is a *free and unconditional* forgiveness. It is not burdened with an



“if,” like Solomon’s pardon to Adonijah: “If he will show himself a worthy man” (1Ki 1:52). Nor yet are you obliged to carry a price in your hand, or to bring a character with you to prove yourself deserving of mercy. Jesus requires but one character, and that is that you should feel yourself a sinful, bad man. (p. 4)

Spurgeon (1973), while focusing on God’s gracious provision of Jesus’ atonement, describes God’s forgiveness as stemming from God’s unilateral mercy, preceding the sinner’s repentance:

The forgiveness is first, and the returning to the Lord is urged as a consequence of that forgiveness. Pardon is not first in the matter of our personal experience, but it is first as matter of fact with God. Oh! The mercy of the Lord Christ, that before we know our sin he has made atonement for it by his own precious blood. (p. 281)

In this statement, Spurgeon is identifying God’s forgiveness with Christ’s atonement.

Owen (1966b), the seventeenth-century Calvinist and strong defender of limited atonement, believed that a sinner cannot be forgiven without the condition of faith and repentance, but he labels God’s forgiveness as unconditional, free, and bountiful:

Because God cannot pardon them? It is not possible with him? Not at all; but because they cannot, they will not believe, that the forgiveness that is with him is such as that it would answer all the wants of their souls, because it answers the infinite largeness of his heart. . . . If there be any pardon with God, it is such as becomes him to give. When he pardons, he will “abundantly pardon.” Go with your half-forgiveness, limited, conditional pardons, with reserves and limitations, unto the sons of men; it may be it may become them, it is like themselves; that of God is absolute and perfect, before which our sins are as a cloud before the east wind and the rising sun. Hence he is said to do this work with his whole heart and his whole soul, “freely,” bountifully, largely to indulge and forgive unto us our sins. (p. 502)

While these Christian thinkers agree with the need for both atonement and repentance, they seem to lean more heavily on the first condition and, thereby, classify God’s forgiveness as unconditional.

However, unlike the old Christian writers who focus on the first stage, most contemporary evangelical scholars agree that God’s forgiveness is conditional, whether they believe that Christian human forgiveness is conditional or unconditional. Not only the scholars on the side of conditional human forgiveness but also the scholars holding to unconditional human forgiveness believe God’s forgiveness as conditional. The reason is that most of the contemporary evangelical scholars on both sides focus on the second stage, that is, the moment the sinner receives God’s forgiveness through repentance,

rather than on the moment of God’s offer of forgiveness through Jesus’ atonement. For example, as we have already examined, all scholars on the side of conditional forgiveness focus on the latter stage of the sinner’s response and believe both divine and human forgiveness are conditional. Brauns (2008) explains,

Christian forgiveness is commitment to the repentant. It is not automatic. Christian are to forgive others as God forgave them. God’s forgiveness is conditional. To be sure, God offers grace to all people, but he forgives only those who repent and believe. Likewise, Jesus said that Christian should forgive if the other repents. (p. 57)

Here, Brauns shows that although he believes in the necessity of the first stage, the unconditional offer of forgiveness (“God offers grace to all people”), he only depends on the second stage, human response (“but he forgives only those who repent and believe”).

On the other hand, Worthington (2009) who believes in unconditional human forgiveness, focusing on the second stage of repentance, states that “within the Scriptures, interpersonal forgiveness is unconditional, whereas divine forgiveness is conditional” (p. 48). Also, Kim and Enright (2015), supporting unconditional human forgiveness, label God’s forgiveness as “conditional divine forgiveness of sins” (p. 23).

In conclusion, it seems overly simplistic to label God’s forgiveness as either conditional or unconditional. A new model of divine forgiveness is needed to embrace both divine and human conditions.

## **An Initial Survey of Divine Forgiveness in the Bible**

### **Biblical Terminology of Forgiveness**

Before defining biblical forgiveness in general, one needs to understand how the Bible uses the word “forgiveness” in both divine and human contexts. Forgiveness always involves an offense committed against some person—either divine or human—that creates a barrier in the relationship. The OT uses several terms for forgiveness: *salah* (סָלַח) *kaphar* (כָּפַר), *nasa* (נָשָׂא) and *makha* (מָחָה).

*Salah* is used 47 times, always with God as the subject, and most commonly

means ‘forgive,’ ‘practice forbearance,’ ‘let go,’ or ‘pardon’ (Hägerland, 2011; BDB). Thus *salah* is often used in the priestly tradition of the Bible to denote divine forgiveness after atonement rituals are performed by sinners such as in Leviticus 4:20 (*NIDB*, vol. 1). God’s willingness to forgive sinners is celebrated with this root word as well (Neh 9:17; Pss 86:5; 103:3; 130:3-4; Isa 55:7). The exclusive use of the word *salah* to refer to divine forgiveness seems to suggest a fundamental difference between divine and human forgiveness.

The word *kaphar* means primarily to ‘cover or cleanse sin,’ ‘propitiate,’ ‘pacify,’ ‘expiate,’ or ‘atone for sin,’ and is used to describe both divine and human forgiveness (BDB, p. 497). As a noun, it is used to refer to the price of life or ransom (Job 33:24, 36:18; Exod 21:30; Prov 13:8, 6:35; Num 35:31-32). When *kaphar* is used with *salah* (Lev 4:20; 19:22; Num 15:25), the former is a prerequisite for atonement—the covering of the offender’s iniquity by pacifying the offended divine party—in order to accomplish *salah*, divine forgiveness. *Kaphar* is often used to describe priests making atonement for the sins of Israel (Lev 1:4; 14:53, 16:32; Exod 29:36, 30:10; Num 8:12, 21) with the atoning sacrifice resulting in reconciliation with God through the forgiveness of sin (*ABD*, vol. 1, 2). Thus the use of *kaphar* in the Bible shows that to restore a broken relationship, offenders should be responsible for making restitution for their sin through atonement. In other words, in the OT, atonement refers to the offender’s duty to seek forgiveness. For example, David uses this verb to ask the Gibeonites how he can make atonement (*kaphar*) for Saul’s sin (2 Sam 21:3), and the Gibeonites request that seven men from Saul’s family be killed. Jacob also pacifies (*kaphar*) his angry brother with gifts (Gen 32:20). As a result, the verb *kaphar* shows that repentance and restitution are required from the offender in order for reconciliation of a broken relationship to occur. Thus, the subject of *kaphar* is usually a human being, such as the sinner or the priest. In the ritual settings in the OT, the sinner prepares the atoning ritual, the priest makes an atonement, and only God, who accepts the atonement, forgives sin (Lev 4:31; Num 15

25-26, 28) (Johansson, 2011). However, this does not mean that the offender's atoning activity itself brings about the forgiveness of the offended party. When God is the subject of this verb, its meaning is "to treat as covered, view propitiously," equal to "forgive" in the situations where there is no atonement ritual (Deut 32:43; Pss 65:3; 79:9; 2 Chr 30:18; Jer 18:23) (BDB, p. 497). Even in the OT, where forgiveness is granted on the condition of the sinners' atoning ritual or repentance, divine forgiveness does not depend on the sinner's repentance, but completely on God's sovereignty (Belousek, 2012; Carter, 2016).

The Hebrew word *nasa* has various meanings such as to "lift up," "carry," and "accept". However, in situations related to sin, *nasa* refers to "the understanding of wrongdoing as a burden taken on and necessarily borne by the evildoer" (*NIDB*, vol. 2, p. 480). When the offender is the subject of the verb, it implies that he is *responsible* for his iniquity (Num 5:31; 14:34), sin (Lev 24:15), guilt (Lev 17:16), or punishment (Lev 5:1, 17; 19:8; Ezek 14:10; 44:12). When the offended party is the subject of this same verb, it denotes the taking away of sin, guilt, or punishment (Gen 18:24; 50:17) (BDB). As a result, the verb *nasa* refers to forgiveness as removing the offender's sin and responsibility for sin, and, thereby, brings to the offender freedom from the burden of guilt.

Although the original meaning of *makhah* is not exactly 'to forgive', but rather, 'to blot out' or 'destroy,' it may denote forgiveness when the object of the verb is the sin or iniquity of the sinner. Blotting out a sinner's iniquity is directly related with forgiveness (Ps 51:1, 9). When God is the subject of this verb, forgiveness is often granted with God's promise of 'forgetting the sin' (Isa 43:25; 44:21-22), and conversely, God's unforgiveness means remembering and not blotting out the sin (Ps 109:14-15). Thus, divine forgiveness and unforgiveness are related metaphorically to God's memory. It is metaphorical, because God is omniscient and does not actually forget.

As a result, OT terminology of forgiveness demonstrates that sin produces

relational barriers that must be resolved and offenders are responsible for the results of their sin. In order to restore the broken relationship, the offender must repent and perform restitution or atonement and the offended must forgive the offender. Thus, forgiveness, which only depends on the gracious decision of the offended party, brings the reconciliation of the broken relationship half way by practicing forbearance (*salah*) and covering (*kaphar*), taking away (*nasa*), or “forgetting” (*makhah*) the sin of the offender. The words used to describe forgiveness in the OT are “each, in different ways, metaphors for the forgiver’s removal of sin from the wrongdoer” (Murphy & Hampton, 1988, p. 37). However, forgiveness alone cannot produce reconciliation; the offender has the responsibility to repent. When forgiveness meets repentance, the relational barrier is completely removed, naturally resulting in reconciliation. In other words, according to the OT, forgiveness is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for the restoration of a broken relationship, because the offender’s repentance and the atoning work are half of the equation.

The NT uses *aphiēmi* (ἀφίημι) or its noun form, *aphesis* (ἄφεσις), *charizomai* (χαρίζομαι e.g., 2 Cor 2:7) and *apoluō* (ἀπολύω) to talk about forgiveness. Although the Greek-speaking context of the first century commonly used the secular Greek word, *suggnōmē* (συγγνώμη), for forgiveness, early Christians never used this word, despite their strong interest in the subject. Bash (2015) assumes that early Christians intentionally avoided the contemporary Greek term for human forgiveness, because the concept was not the same as Christian forgiveness. Traditionally, in Greek culture, forgiveness was not regarded as a virtue; not only was asking for forgiveness to take an inferior position, extending forgiveness by giving up revenge without receiving restitution and, thereby, making oneself vulnerable, was also shameful (Griswold & Konstan, 2012). Ancient Greek philosophers believed that forgiveness would obviate justice, and because wise and self-sufficient men cannot be injured and commit no injury, there would be no need for forgiveness (Griswold, 2007). In this respect, *suggnōmē* in Greek literature is used to

convey an excuse, rather than forgiveness, and could be granted to wrongdoers whose actions were involuntary by someone other than the injured party (Griswold, 2007; Griswold & Konstan, 2012).

Therefore, instead of this secular word *suggnōmē*, Christians used the words from the LXX and a new word that emphasized the distinctive Christian character of forgiveness. *Apoluō* means ‘set free from,’ ‘ransom,’ ‘divorce,’ (BDAG). Although it is used to mean ‘forgive’ in Luke 6:37, the other uses of *apoluō* in the NT show that forgiveness is about setting the offender free from bondage (Matt 27:15). In fact, the NT writers often used two other words: *aphiēmi* and *charizomai*; the former is used mainly by the Synoptic gospel writers and the latter exclusively by Paul. *Aphiēmi*, or its noun *aphesis*, means ‘let go’ (Mark 4:36), ‘give up’ (Matt 27:50), ‘leave’ (Matt 4:22; Mark 1:20), or ‘release’ (Luke 4:18). Bash (2015) points out that NT writers use *aphiēmi* to emphasize that victims have decided to let wrongdoers or wrongdoings go. Thus, *aphiēmi* shows that forgiveness is the willful choice of the offended party. *Aphiēmi*, or *aphesis*, also holds the economic meaning of releasing a debt or obligation (Matt 6:12, 18:27; Luke 11:4) (BDAG). Matthew writes in the Lord’s Prayer, “forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (6:12), but Luke renders these words “forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us” (Luke 11:4). As a result, sin is biblically characterized as a debt resulting in guilt and penalty and the sinner as a debtor (Bash, 2015). Within the meaning of debt, the Bible emphasizes the responsibility or duty of an offender to repay his victims for the ways he wronged them. Conversely, victims, as creditors, have the just right to be repaid by the offender. In this respect, forgiveness means that victims voluntarily give up their fair or full right to demand repayment. Therefore, offenders should recognize that, as debtors, they do not have any right to demand the gracious gift of forgiveness; instead, they have only the duty to repay the victim. Those in the position to forgive should not do so begrudgingly, and out of duty, but instead should recognize that God forgives repentant sinners on the basis of

grace. In the LXX, Moses prays that God, the subject of the verb *aphiēmi* may forgive (*aphiēmi*) Israel's idolatry in Exodus 32: 32. God, as a personal agent and Creator, does not have an obligation to forgive his people when they sin against him. Grudem (2000) states,

It is important to realize that it was not necessary for God to save any people at all. When we appreciate that “God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of nether gloom to be kept until the judgment” (2 Peter 2:4), then we realize that God could also have chosen with perfect justice to have left us in our sins awaiting judgment: he could have chosen to save no one, just as he did with the sinful angels. So in this sense the atonement was not absolutely necessary. But once God, in his love, decided to save some human beings, then several passages in Scripture indicate that there was no other way for God to do this than through the death of his son. Therefore, the atonement was not absolutely necessary, but as a “consequence” of God's decision to save some human being, the atonement was absolutely necessary. (p. 569)

In other words, God forgives sinners voluntarily and mercifully. Thus, God's forgiveness is a gift, not a duty (Bash, 2007). Likewise, human beings, as God's image bearers, should be willing to grant the gift of forgiveness to their offenders as well.

The idea of forgiveness being a gift is conveyed by the verb, *charizomai*, which Paul uses often. In fact, Luke uses this verb, *charizomai*, with a common meaning of ‘give freely’ or ‘do away with’ (Luke 7:21, 42; Acts 27:24). However, Paul seems to use this term intentionally to emphasize the character of forgiveness as a gift of grace (*χάρις*) in settings related with forgiveness (BDAG; Shults & Sandage, 2003; *NIDB*, vol. 2). *Charizomai* stems from the noun *charis* (*χάρις*) which means “grace” and so means to “give or grant a favor freely” or “show oneself to be gracious by forgiving wrongdoing” with reference to both divine and human forgiveness (BDAG, p. 1078). As a result, forgiveness in the NT is understood as graciously releasing the offender from some burden or debt, thereby giving them freedom from responsibility or captivity. In this way, the NT emphasizes the gracious character of forgiveness as a gift more than the OT.

### **The Prototype of Human Forgiveness: Divine Forgiveness**

Forgiveness is one aspect, among many, in which the Bible commands God's

people to be like God (Eph 5:1). For example, we should be merciful (Luke 6:36), be perfect like our heavenly Father (Matt 5:48), be holy (Lev 11:44-45; 1 Pet 1:15-16), and reflect God's love in our human relationship (John 15:12; 13:34; Eph 5:2; 1 John 4:11). Similarly, we should forgive like God (Matt 6:12; 18:33-35; Eph 4:32; Col 3:13). In brief, God wants human beings to be like him in every aspect of life. This is implied in the teaching that God made humans in his own image (Gen 1:17; Jas 3:9). In fact, Jesus also wanted his disciples to be like him: "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you" (John 13:15). This is because Jesus is the perfect reflection of God (John 14:9; 10:30). Paul also commands Christians to be like Jesus (Rom 15:5; 1 Cor 11:1), who is the perfect image of God (Col 1:15) and to be like Jesus Christ is to be like God. Thus, Paul states that Christians should forgive each other just as God in Christ forgives them (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13). In other words, Christian human forgiveness should be Godlike forgiveness, and to grasp Christian human forgiveness, we have to presupposes the understanding of divine forgiveness, the prototype of human forgiveness.

### **The Foundation of God's Forgiveness: Atonement**

The OT explains that God's people under the written law during the OT era were forgiven by God through atoning sacrifices, which, as we learn in the NT, were an anticipation of Christ's atonement (Lev 19:22; Heb 9:12; Isa 53:5-6). According to the final NT form of divine forgiveness, divine forgiveness of sin is not possible without the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, which was accomplished two thousand years ago (Matt 26:28; Rom 3: 23-26; 5:6-11; Col 1:13-14; Eph 1:7; 1 Pet 1:18-19; 1 John 2:2). Jesus himself understood his own death as an atoning sacrifice, necessary for divine forgiveness (Matt 26:28; 20:28 Mark 14:24; 10:45). In other words, Jesus' atoning death is the foundation, or the primary condition, of divine forgiveness for sinners (Achtmeier, 1985; Grudem, 2000; Stott, 2006). In Romans 5:8-11, Paul emphasizes that Jesus has already accomplished a perfect atonement unilaterally, even before any person



sought forgiveness through repentance (Soderlund & Wright, 1999). This dissertation will trace how the atonement also has been developed through redemptive history. Because of the importance of atonement in divine forgiveness, its development through the Old and New Testaments will shape our understanding of divine forgiveness.

### **The Offended Party as Forgiver**

God is the original initiator of forgiveness, since throughout biblical history, God demonstrated repeatedly to his people that he was the only one who could ultimately forgive sin (Isa 55:4; Ps 130:4) (Owen, 1966b; Johansson, 2011). For example, in the OT, when a sacrifice was made for sin, the priest would declare the sinner forgiven, using the passive voice, rather than the active voice: “And the priest shall make atonement for him, and he *shall be forgiven*” (Lev 4:31; cf. 4:20, 26, 35; 5:10; 6:7; Num 15:25-26) (Johansson, 2011; Hägerland, 2011). It seems plausible that the passive declaration of forgiveness indicates that God is the only true source of forgiveness, not the human agents who are the offenders. Because God is Creator, he stands in the position of giver in relationship to his creatures (Volf, 2006a). According to the Bible, God is the God who can forgive sins; forgiveness is an important part of God’s self-description. After Israel committed the sin of idolatry in worshipping the golden calf and Moses prayed to see God’s glory, God described himself in the following way:

The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation. (Exod 34:6-7)

According to God’s self-description, God is not only a forgiving God, but a punishing God as well. God’s forgiveness is an expression of his eternal character of mercy, but it “does not eliminate Yahweh’s prerogative and responsibility to punish sin” (*NIDB*, Vol. 2, p. 481). In fact, God’s forgiveness of the idolatrous Israelites came with his justice, and many people died as a result of judgment (Exod 32:28-34). However, due to the gracious

forgiving character of God (Exod 33:19; 34:6-10), God's covenant with Israel was not brought to an end, even in the face of the seriousness of its sin (Kessler, 2013). Later, Moses appealed to God to forgive Israel after the report of the ten unbelieving spies on the same basis of God's forgiving character (Num 14: 17-20).

This same description of God as a forgiving God has been cited by different biblical writers (Neh 9:17; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Pss 99:8; 103), who emphasize and apply it to their respective circumstances (Kessler, 2013; Baloian, 1992). For example, Nehemiah, who longs for the restoration of Israel from exile, emphasizes that God, as a God of forgiveness, never forsakes his people (Neh 9:17). Psalm 103 encourages us to praise God by describing him as a God who heals diseases and forgives sins as a merciful and compassionate father (Ps 103: 3-14). In fact, the OT consistently describes forgiveness as a most important characteristic of God (Exod 34:5-7; Num 14:18-19; Neh 9:17; Pss 86:5, 15; 103:3; 130:3-4; Joel 2:13). Furthermore, God's master plan, even before creation, was to save sinners through the cross (2 Tim 1:9; Eph 1:4-7). In other words, God was a forgiving God even before a need for forgiveness arose historically (i.e., before the fall) (Benner & Harvey, 1996). As a result, God's forgiveness is fundamentally rooted in his eternal character, and so it is a divine action that expresses God's eternal attributes of goodness and love (Boda & Smith, 2006; Fretheim, 1991; Belousek, 2011). Thus, God's forgiveness is not primarily instigated by the actions of human sinners (e.g. repentance) although there is a relationship (Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; 1 Kgs 21:29; 2 Chr 12:12). For example, God does not forgive every repentant sinner. Although Achan confessed his sin and returned the stolen items (Josh 7:20-23), he could not receive forgiveness from God. In Isaiah 6:7, Isaiah's sins are forgiven through a seraph acting as God's agent, not as a result of any atoning activity. In this respect, Bash (2007) states that "forgiveness was a gift of grace, and God did not have to forgive except by God's own choice and volition" (p. 25). The Bible shows that although God punished the nation of Israel, on account of his love and faithfulness he did not stop forgiving

them, even in the face of their continual unfaithfulness (Lev 26:42; Deut 4:31; 9:26-27; 2 Kgs 13:23; Ps 106:40-46; Jer 33:25-26; Mic 7:20). For instance, Psalm 78 highlights divine mercy against the backdrop of Israel's unfaithfulness:

Their heart was not steadfast toward him; they were not faithful to his covenant. Yet he, being compassionate, atoned for their iniquity and did not destroy them; he restrained his anger often and did not stir up all his wrath. (Ps 78: 7-8)

Belousek (2011) emphasizes that even in the age of the Law in the OT, "God forgives our sin, not because of who we are or what we offer, but because of who God is" (p. 194).

Finally, God's gracious, forgiving character is showcased most in Christ's atonement for undeserving sinners (Rom 5:6-11). Christ's atonement as the final form of divine forgiveness shows that divine forgiveness was initiated and prepared unilaterally and sovereignly by God alone. This suggests that godly human forgiveness is more than a simple social act; it is a voluntary gift, which reflects a person's character.

### **Being Forgiven through Repentance**

God's gracious and voluntary gift of forgiveness is not granted to every sinner, but only the repentant or the seeker of forgiveness. In other words, God treats humans as personal agents who can decide to respond to his offer of divine forgiveness and who take responsibility for their sins through repentance. Humans have freedom to choose to receive God's forgiveness or not (Matt 22:1-13). Bash (2011) states that in both the OT and the NT, repenting acts, such as "confession, repentance and restitution," precede God's forgiveness (p. 20). While this statement is true of the OT, it only accounts for one of the two conditions necessary for forgiveness in the NT. There is an important difference between the order of repentance and atonement in divine forgiveness in the OT and the NT. In the OT, those who had committed unintentional or forgivable sins could seek atonement through animal sacrifices, that is, a process of repentance, which might include recognition of one's wrongdoing (Lev 4:13, 22, 27; 5:2-5, 17, 19; Num 5:6, 7), confession (Lev 5:5, 16:21, 26:40; Num 5:6-7), or restitution (Lev 5:14-19, 6:1-7) of sin.

Divine forgiveness in the OT was only possible for those who had fulfilled this condition (Sklar, 2012). However, in the NT, atonement through Christ, which is the first condition of divine forgiveness, precedes the sinner's taking responsibility for the offense through repentance (Rom 5:8-11). Thus, while divine forgiveness seems to be only bestowed on those who take proper responsibility for their sin in the OT, it is offered to sinners in the NT through the gospel prior to any personal response (Murray, 1976a, 1999). However, in spite of this difference, we can find an unchangeable truth: no person can secure divine forgiveness without taking responsibility for their sin. Only those who are willing to act as personal agents and acknowledge their wrong can receive the amazing gift of divine forgiveness. Although forgiveness is a gift, repentance remains a duty. In other words, the victim has the freedom as a personal agent to withhold forgiveness, while the offender's personal agency before God obligates him or her to make amends, regardless of whether forgiveness is offered or withheld.

### **The Original Offense: Sin**

The need for both divine and human forgiveness arises from sin. The concept of sin distinguishes biblical forgiveness from its secular counterpart. Unlike the secular concept of forgiveness that involves only two parties—a human offender and a human victim—biblical human forgiveness always involves a relational triangle consisting of the human offender, the human victim, and God. This is because forgiveness in the Bible is directly related to sin and every sin is “the violation of God's law, and is thus understood as a breach of justice” (Konstan, 2010, p. 106). As a result, biblical forgiveness in human relationships involves *two* offended parties: one divine and one human.

When God created the universe, there was no need for forgiveness because there was no sin on earth to be forgiven. John Owen (1966b) states that when Adam and Eve committed the first sin, they did not know about forgiveness:

Forgiveness is not revealed by the light of nature. . . . When he [Adam] had sinned, it is evident that he had not the least apprehension that there was forgiveness with

God. Such a thought would have laid a foundation of some farther treaty with God about his condition. But he had no other design but of flying and hiding himself, Gen. iii. 10; so declaring that he was utterly ignorant of any such thing as pardoning mercy. Such, and no other, are all the first or purely natural conceptions of sinners, namely, that it is the judgment of God. (p. 428)

Likewise, humans do not learn about divine forgiveness as the solution to the problem of sin through God's general revelation. Allison (2016) defines general revelation as follows:

God's communication of himself to all peoples at all times and in all places by which they may know of his existence, some of his attributes, and something of his moral law. General revelation has four modes: the created order (Rom 1:18-25), the human conscience or internal moral sense (Rom 2:12-16), God's providential care (Acts 14:8-18), and an innate sense of God (Acts 17:22-31). (p. 90)

In other words, Christian human forgiveness reflecting divine forgiveness must imply something beyond aspects of natural humanity revealed in general revelation. Instead, divine forgiveness was, as a core component of God's master plan, shared through his special revelation of Jesus Christ (Gen 3:15; Heb 9:22) to solve the problem of sin. Owen (1966b) states that God gave the promise of forgiveness right after the fall (Gen 3:15) and instituted the rituals of religious worship or the sacrificial system as the means for divine forgiveness of human sin and reconciliation until Jesus came (Gen 4).

### **The Personal Effects of Divine Forgiveness**

The effects of God's forgiveness are directly linked to the effects of the fall. The Bible shows that God's forgiveness bestows far-reaching benefits to forgiven human beings. First, God's forgiveness delivers people from God's wrath toward sinners. The Bible says that all sinners are "by nature children of wrath" (Eph 2:3). According to the Bible, God's main emotional reaction to human sin is anger (Pss 38:3; 85:1-7; Mic 7:18; Exod 15:7; Isa 13:4, 6, 9; Ezek 5:11-17; Rom 1:18; Rev 14:8-11). When there is no forgiveness, the wrath of God is poured out instead (Ezek 24:13). According to Exodus 34:6-8, God is not only merciful and forgiving, but also a God of justice who punishes sin. Carson (2000) states,

In itself, wrath, unlike love, is not one of the intrinsic perfections of God. Rather, it is a function of God's holiness against sin. Where there is no sin, there is no wrath. Where God in his holiness confronts his image-bearers in their rebellion, there must be wrath, or God is not the jealous God he claims to be, and his holiness is impugned. (p. 67)

God's wrath against sinners implies that human beings, as his image-bearers, might also be angry at the sin of their offenders. In fact, a myriad of research shows that a victim's primary emotion is anger when she is treated wrongly or injured (Balswick, King, & Reimer, 2005; McCullough et al., 2001; Worthington, 2006; Griswold, 2007). Griswold (2007) states that "if one felt no resentment in response to someone's injurious action against oneself, it would make no sense to forgive them for their deed" (p. 40). Thus, a human victim's wrath toward an offender should be regarded as natural and forgiveness can remove this wrath.

Second, God's forgiveness gives ethical cleanness to the recipient: "how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (Heb 9:14) (Benner & Harvey, 1995). This means that God's forgiveness results in a clean conscience, which is a sense of ethical purification (Heb 9:12-14, 22). The idea of ethical cleanness is related with the Hebrew concept of sin as pollution. In the Torah, Israel's sin is often described as defilement or pollution, which required purification and so a sin offering was also called a purification offering (Romerowski, 2006; Gane, 2005). The high priest would sprinkle himself, all of Israel, the inner and outer sanctuary of the temple, and the altar with blood seven times for purification from sin (Lev 4:6, 17; 16:14-16) (Gane, 2005). David also prayed that God would clean or forgive him from his adulterous sin (Ps 51:2): "create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Ps 51:10). This implies that God's forgiveness produces a cleansing of the person who is polluted by sin.

Third, God's forgiveness gives the forgiven a sense of healing. In the Bible, sin is related to sickness, such as diseases or plagues, and God's forgiveness of sin brings

physical, emotional, and spiritual healing (Pss 32:1-11; 38:3; 103:1-5; 2 Chr 7:14; Deut 28:22; Mark 2:1-11; John 5:14; 1 Cor 11:29-30). For instance, a paralytic man was healed on the same occasion that Jesus forgave him (Mark 2: 1-12). God's forgiveness is described as taking away guilt and shame (Pss 38: 4, 7, 10; 51:1-9; Heb 9:14; 10:22), even though the guilt and shame people feel might not be totally eliminated or might come back through backsliding or weakness until they enter the stage of consummation (Rom 7:14-25; 8:23). This implies that sickness and emotional burdens can result from sin and God's forgiveness, when appropriated by faith, can produce a sense of physical and emotional release.

Fourth, in consideration with regeneration, adoption, and other aspects of salvation, divine forgiveness gives sinners a new beginning and makes it possible for them to become part of the new creation (2 Cor 5:17) and develop a new identity as God's children (Rom 8:15). For example, the sinful woman in Luke 7:36-50, who was considered unrighteous by the Pharisee Simon (Luke 7:39), received a new identity, that of a righteous forgiven sinner through the divine forgiveness Jesus granted her (Snodgrass, 2011). In this respect, Owen (1966b) describes divine forgiveness as a sharp line dividing two kinds of people: regenerate and unregenerate people. When sinners first receive divine forgiveness, they are also regenerated and God's perspective towards them is changed. God does not remember their sin any longer (Jer 31:34; Ps 79:8; Isa 43:25; 64:8). Adams (1989) states that because God is omniscient and remembers everything, forgiveness means not bringing up a person's sin once it has been forgiven and seeing the person with new eyes. Thus, divine forgiveness is focused not only on the past, but also on the future. In this respect, human forgiveness may involve the offer of a new start to the relationship, because the victim sees the offender through new eyes—revising her judgement, emotions, and attitude toward the offender (Griswold, 2007; Worthington, 2006).

## **Goal of Divine Forgiveness**

One goal of God's forgiveness is reconciliation (1 John 4:10; Rom 3:25; 5:10) (Frise & McMinn, 2010). Biblically, forgiveness "is not identical with reconciliation, but is a stage introductory to it" (Taylor, 1941, p. 4). Reconciliation can occur only when both the victim and the offender seek to renew their relationship by forgiving and repenting respectively. As a result, reconciliation is necessarily mutual. In fact, reconciliation is an important theme in the Bible (Col 1:20-22). The purpose of Jesus coming to the world is pronounced as peace (Luke 1:79; 2:14; 19:38; Eph 2:17; Col 1:20) and Christ himself, as our peace, reconciles people one to another (Eph 2:14-17). The idea of reconciliation is also described as the main theme of the new creation in 2 Corinthians 5:14-21; in Christ, God and sinners are reconciled, and Christians receive the ministry of reconciliation between God and others. The scope of this reconciliation is extended to relations between people (Eph 2:11-22; Rom 12:18; 1 Thess 5:13) and all things both on earth and in heaven (Col 1:20) (Beale, 1994; Taylor, 1941). Ridderbos (1978) states that reconciliation is the purpose of Christ's coming and that "the entire content of the NT could be called a message of reconciliation" (p. 78). Thus, biblically, forgiveness is not an end in itself but a step toward reconciliation. Jones (1995) states that "a Christian account of forgiveness ought not simply or even primarily be focused on the absolution of guilt; rather, it ought to be focused on the reconciliation of brokenness, the restoration of communion—with God, with one another, and with the whole Creation" (p. xii).

Unfortunately, forgiveness does not always result in reconciliation. For example, in the Gospels we see that many people did not receive Jesus' forgiveness and his gospel of reconciliation because of their refusal to repent (Matt 11: 20-24; Luke 10:13-16). Thus, from a biblical perspective we see that there can be forgiveness without reconciliation, but not reconciliation without forgiveness (Carson, 2002). Carson rejects a definition of forgiveness that reflects mutual stances, and differentiates unilateral



forgiveness from bilateral reconciliation:

It is important to recognize the distinction between forgiveness and reconciliation. The latter presupposes the former; the former does not entail the latter. In other words, although forgiveness may bring about reconciliation, it may not. It is possible for one party to forgive another from the heart while the other party remains hardened in self-righteous bitterness. To put the matter another way: in some contexts, forgiveness is bound up with reconciliation, but in other contexts forgiveness reflects the stance of the one who forgives. (pp. 73-74)

At the same time, Worthington (1998) states that reconciliation without forgiveness does exist in the broader world:

When reconciliation without forgiveness occurs, it might be because people are forced to forgive, simply decide to get on with their relationship without giving much thought to forgiveness, or feel the hurtful act was too insignificant to worry about or might be too difficult to forgive. (p. 130)

However, this kind of reconciliation cannot be considered biblical, because it does not involve two necessary factors: forgiveness and repentance.

### **Motive of Divine Forgiveness**

The motive of divine forgiveness is love (1 John 4:10; John 3:16; Rom 8:31-39; 5:8 Eph 1:3-5). According to Romans 5:8, Christ's atonement, which we have seen is the foundation of divine forgiveness, is a revelation of God's love to sinners. Murray (1976a) describes God's love as "the fountain from which Christ's death flows" (p. 65). Therefore, to grasp biblical forgiveness, one must first understand biblical love. The Bible often shows the close relationship between love and forgiveness (Ps 86:5; Mic 7:18-19; Eph 4:32-5:2; Luke 7:47; John 3:16-17; Rom 5:8; 2 Cor 2:7-8; 1 John 4:10) (Cheong 2005; Adams, 1989; MacArthur, 1998). While the link between God's love and forgiveness is described most fully in the NT, the OT also links God's forgiveness with his lovingkindness (Prov 10:12; 17:9; Pss 86:5; 130:7; Mic 7:18-19). God's forgiveness and love are first brought together in the "garments of skin" he provided for Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:21 by killing an innocent animal; this served as a shadow of the atonement that was later to be offered through Christ to cover the sinner's guilt and shame (Rev 5:6; 13:8; Heb 9:22) (Owen, 1966b). God's love for sinful Israel expressed

itself in the provision of a way of atonement through animal sacrifice, even before Israel fully grasped its need (Sklar, 2012). Throughout the development of redemptive history, the theme of God's forgiveness motivated by his love for humanity becomes more and more explicit until it climaxed in Christ on the cross (Rom 5:8).

### **Foundational Relationship between Divine and Human Forgiveness**

The foundation of the similarity between divine and human forgiveness is the fact that humankind was made in God's image (Gen 1:26-27). Just as humans are God's image bearers, human forgiveness should reflect God's forgiveness (Col 3:10-13; Eph 4:24-5:2). Christians are exhorted to love and forgive their enemies, because each person bears God's image, even though it is distorted by sin (Calvin, 2007; Owen, 1966b; Baxter, 1973). According to Genesis 1:26-27, God created humans in his image and in his likeness.

However, because the image of God refers to the whole person as a psychosomatic unity, with substantive, functional and relational dimensions, with reference to the issue of forgiveness, the relational aspect of humanity's image-bearing role seems to be the most relevant aspect, because forgiveness addresses relational problems.

**Relational aspect of *Imago Dei*.** Human beings reflect God in their relational capacity since God himself is a relational being as seen through the mutual love expressed within the Trinity (Johnson, 2007; Balswick et al., 2005; Shults & Sandage, 2003). Within the Godhead, "the three trinitarian persons are persons-in-relation" (Grenz, 2001, p. 9). Thus, human beings as God's image bearers exist in relationship with both God and others. The word "image" itself presupposes correspondence to God as the one being represented. Chirban (1996) states, "only when I see myself in relationship with

God does my personhood acquire authentic meaning. . . . In this sense, the theist is the only true humanist” (p. 3).

Humans are called into relationship with others as well, because God created them as male and female (Gen 1:27). Therefore, biblical anthropology should always be understood in light of the inter-relational nature of humanity established by God himself. After all, it was prior to the fall that God placed Adam in relationship with another human being, Eve (Gen 1:26-27). Buber (1992) states that our relational nature is an essential element of being human: “Man exists anthropologically not in isolation, but in the completeness of the relation between man and man; what humanity is can be properly grasped only in vital reciprocity” (p. 77). Psychologists, especially object-relation theorists, agree that relationships with others are essential to human development and that we recognize who we are only through our relationships with others (Kegan, 1982; Balswick et al., 2005; Shults & Sandage, 2003). While it cannot be reduced to the following, “to bear the image of God is to live in reciprocating relationships with God and our fellow human beings” (Balswick et al., 2005, p. 40). The Bible says that these reciprocating relationships are held together by love, which is from God (Col 3:14; 1 John 4:7-21). Thus, to be the *imago Dei* requires a person to be a lover both of God and of others.

The importance of relationality to the *imago Dei* is evident, not only in love, but also in sin (Augsburger, 1996). As *imago Dei* refers to every aspect of the whole human being, so sin wreaks depravity on humanity as a whole, impacting peoples’ functionality and nature, including their relationships. In fact, the social dimension of sin is evidenced in its being the cause of or reason for forgiveness. Carson (2008) states that “sin is social; although it is first and foremost defiance of God, there is no sin that does not touch the lives of others” (p. 46). For example, even suicide is a relational sin against the self, God, and others. Thus, “from a theological perspective sin can be defined as a failure to be in right relationship” (Balswick et al., 2005, p. 67). Broken relationships

that are the result of sin can be restored by reconciliation, which is tied in the Bible to the offender's repentance and the victim's forgiveness. Consequently, this dissertation focuses on the relational aspect of *imago Dei*.

**Personal agency of *Imago Dei*.** God acts as a personal agent, as the sovereign creator, savior, and sustainer of the created world (Kirkpatrick, 2014). Thus, as God's image bearer humans are also created as personal agents who are responsible for obeying (Rom 2:15) (*ISBE*; Johnson, 2007). Johnson (2007) defines mature personal agency as follows:

Mature personal agents are beings characterized by rational-linguistic ability; a high degree of self-awareness (compared to other earthly creatures); the capacity to form reasons, plans and intentions, and to act; responsibility (the awareness that they should be held accountable for their actions); and imagination (they can envision new plausible possibilities in life). Healthy personal agents therefore should have the sense that they are actors (rather than just being acted upon by deterministic forces). (pp. 310-11)

Sadly, personal agency may also be immature, even sinful, such that one's free actions may infringe upon another person's agency; therefore, God holds individuals responsible for violating his commandments when they sin against another person. God always holds sinners responsible for their sins by requiring atonement, confession, and restitution. Stott (2006) states,

A full acknowledgment of human responsibility and therefore guilt, far from diminishing the dignity of human beings, actually enhances it. It presupposes that men and women, unlike the animals, are morally responsible beings, who know what they are, could be and should be, and do not make excuses for their poor performance. (p. 102)

As a result, the whole OT and NT show that repentance is an absolute requirement for God's people (Carter, 2016). However, in this study we will see that sinful human beings have always sought to avoid the responsibility and guilt of their sins as much as possible. At the same time, applying Johnson's definition of personal agency to the present context, relatively mature human victims of an offense have the freedom to choose their reaction toward the offender (whether they will forgive or not) and we might infer further

that a proactive, rather than reactive act of forgiveness actually enhances one's sense of personal agency. As we continue in this study, we will see how God enhances the victim's personal agency in the NT era by emphasizing the victim's proactive role of reaching out and forgiving the offender.

### **The Analogy of Divine and Human Forgiveness**

How can Christians imitate God's forgiveness through Christ (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13)? To answer this question, we must first consider the similarities and differences between divine and human forgiveness, including the nature of the forgivers, sin's effects on the offended parties, and the effect of forgiveness in the respective cases (Bash, 2011).

First, because human beings differ from God in nature, there are essential differences between God and humanity in the granting of forgiveness. God is holy, just, omniscient with a perfect understanding of sin, and omnipotent as the only one who can solve the problem of human sin. By contrast, human beings are depraved, stained by sin and totally unable to overcome sin in and of themselves. (Stott, 2006). Because human beings are impacted by the power of sin, they have a dominant natural human desire to get even, a self-deceiving perception about the other's offense (Matt 7:3-4), and a strong inner resistance to forgiveness (2 Tim 3:3). In other words, human forgiveness is about a sinner forgiving another sinner. Psychologically, depraved human beings tend to be unwilling to forgive. However, God is forgiving and gracious by nature (Bash, 2011, 2015; Boda & Smith, 2006). So when God forgives sinners, he is not affected by distorted perceptions, defensive mechanisms, or depraved unforgiving emotions, but he forgives according to his sovereignty on the basis of his perfect justice, awareness, and love. Thus, we should not overlook the infinite difference between the divine and the human forgiver; "we humans are not God, and not everything that is characteristic of God is possible or appropriate for human beings" (Watts & Gulliford, 2004, p. 55). Owen (1966b) states that the nature of God's forgiveness through Christ goes beyond anything

that humans can think of: “God himself doth really separate and distinguish his forgiveness from anything that our thoughts and imaginations can reach unto; and that because it is his, and like himself” (p. 499).

Second, God and humans are affected by sin in different ways. When a person steals another person’s money, he offends both God and the human victim. The human victim may experience financial, relational, and psychological suffering, but God is not affected by the sin in such ways (Job 35:6), although every sin is enmity against God (Stott, 2006). God also experiences emotional state of hatred (Deut 7:25; Ps 45:7; Rom 8:7), indignation (Ps 78:58-59), and grief (Eph 4:30) because of the sin. However, despite such emotional reactions of God, the sin will mainly result in alienation in God’s relationship with the offender because of God’s holiness (Isa 59:2) (Erickson, 2013). Furthermore, even if the offender were to repay the money and apologize for his sin, the human victim cannot cancel or forget what took place. So also the mother whose daughter was murdered; although she may forgive the repentant murderer who is in jail, she will never see her daughter again and may suffer from horrible memories. Only God can remove all results of sin, including alienation, suffering, and the memory of the offense (Isa 38:17; 43:25; Mic 7:19; Jer 31:34; Ps 103:12). He is even able to change an evil act into something good in terms of consequence (Bash, 2011). Joseph testified to this, when he explained to his brothers regarding their heinous offense (Gen 45:5, 7, 8; 50:20): “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive” (Gen 50:20). God was not in the same way affected by the sins of the brothers as Joseph, who was sold as slave, suffered, and was imprisoned. Whereas Joseph had to live with these consequences, God was in control of it all and saved many people, including Jacob’s family.

Third, the process of divine and human forgiveness is significantly different. As mentioned before, divine forgiveness is accomplished through Christ’s atoning death on the cross (Rom 5:8; Eph 1:7), and offered to all sinners but only can be granted to the

believers on the moment of conversion. In other words, the process of divine forgiveness consists of two different stages: offering atonement and granting forgiveness. However, human forgiveness does not include a process of atonement (Morris, 1984). Simply, human beings cannot atone for sin (Stott, 2006). For example, Moses in Exodus 32:30-35 offered himself as an atonement for the sins of Israelite that had committed the golden calf idolatry by asking God to blot out his name from God's book. However, God answered Moses that no human beings can atone for sins: "Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot him out of my book" (Exo 32:33). As a result, because there is no atonement possible in human forgiveness, the second stage of divine forgiveness, i.e., the stage of applying the offered forgiveness is not required. In other words, the process of human forgiveness consists of just one stage: granting forgiveness.

Fourth, the effects of divine and human forgiveness are very different, too. Sin introduces the need for divine forgiveness and there are two types of sin: original sin, which is the root of depravity, and actual sins, which are the fruit of original sin (Hoekema, 1994). Divine forgiveness is the only perfect and fundamental solution for the root of original sin, as well as for its fruit, by removing all the results of both original sin and actual sins. However, the need for human forgiveness stems from broken human relationships, which result from a human being's actual sin against another as a fruit of original sin. In this respect, human forgiveness cannot be compared with divine forgiveness, which brings eternal salvation. Furthermore, the effects of human forgiveness are very different from "the riches of his grace" (Eph 1:7) and the blessings (Eph 1:3) that God's forgiveness brings to its recipient, which include a new identity as righteous and holy children of God (Eph 1:4-5; John 1:12; Luke 23:43), becoming a new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Rom 8:1), the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13-14), and purification of sinfulness (Ps 103:12; Heb 9:14).

Because of these differences between God's and our forgiveness, we can conclude that "we humans are not God, and not everything that is characteristic of God is

possible or appropriate for human beings” (Watts & Gulliford, 2004, p. 55). Thus, the Bible states that no one can forgive sin, but God alone (Mark 2:7), that is, only God can absolve a sin absolutely. Human beings do not have the ability to imitate God’s forgiveness in exactly the same way, because he is holy, omniscient, just, and omnipotent (Owen, 1966b; Bash, 2007; Watts & Gulliford, 2004). Cheong (2005) raises an important question: “if only God can forgive sins, then what does He expect from His people when He commands them to forgive, just as Christ has forgiven?” (p. 5). In addressing this very question, Danaher (2000) suggests the following:

There are no instances of forgiveness where someone forgave the murder of a loved one and then entered into a loving marriage with that individual. That is the kind of instance that would be needed to communicate God’s concept. Since such examples are rare or nonexistent in our experience, the concept we develop of forgiveness is something far less than God’s concept. Perhaps we simply do not have the capacity for such forgiveness, but it is possible, through reflection, to understand some of the things that limit our forgiveness and make it something less than God’s forgiveness. (p. 99)

Therefore, because of the infinite difference between divinity and humanity (Isa 55:9), human beings can only imitate God’s forgiveness analogically and figuratively through “reflection” (Gowan, 2010, p. 202; Danaher, 2000, p. 99). Just as humans are a reflection of God’s image, but cannot be God himself, human forgiveness may be seen as a picture of divine forgiveness, “that is an intrinsic aspect of God’s character,” but cannot be identical to divine forgiveness (Unsworth, 2001, p. 4).

In spite of this infinite difference, we should also note the continuity between divine and human forgiveness. In Bash’s words, “interpersonal forgiveness is a scion of divine forgiveness—not the same and not as richly textured, but nevertheless genealogically related—and so necessarily also described and explained by metaphor” (Bash, 2015, p. 31). The similarities and close relationship between divine and human forgiveness are discussed in four points.

First, both are gifts. Divine forgiveness is a gift on the basis of its supernatural origin (Volf, 2006a; Bash, 2007). Many psychologists and philosophers believe that



human forgiveness is also a gift or “a voluntary act that one does not necessarily have to do” (Bash, 2007, p. 102). In a closed universe with no transcendent god, there would be no duty to forgive others. Both divine and human forgiveness consist of grace given by the offended to the offender (Benner & Harvey, 1996).

Second, divine forgiveness directly affects human forgiveness, because the human experience of divine love and forgiveness intensifies love and forgiveness for others (Floristan & Duquoc, 1986). Divine forgiveness in the NT transforms its recipients into new creatures, that is, into habitual forgivers like God (Owen, 1966b; Bash, 2007). This transformative power is the main reason for the continuity between divine and human forgiveness.

Third, in spite of the limitations of human forgiveness, research indicates that, human forgiveness also offers numerous benefits such as spiritual, psychological, social and physical wellbeing to both the offended and offending parties. This is largely because, as the *Imago Dei*, humans imitate God when they forgive, whether they are believers or not. In this way, they resemble their creator, the true forgiver, even though they may not be aware of it (MacArthur, 2009). Thus, human forgiveness is a good example of creation grace that helps to limit the sinfulness of the world (Plantinga, 2002).

Fourth, the analogy of divine and human forgiveness based on human beings as God’s image-bearers leads to another critical analogy—the connection between God and the human victim. In fact, the offender’s sin against the human victim is ultimately committed against God, because all sin is essentially enmity toward God (Rom 8:7) (Stott, 2006; Owen, 1966b). So, God is always the primary offended party and the human victim, as a representative of God, the secondary. According to the analogy between divine and human forgiveness, the human victim should imitate God in forgiveness, as much as possible, and the offender should repent to the human victim by taking responsibility for his or her sin. In this dissertation we will find that the OT emphasizes the offender’s duty to the offended parties (both human and divine), but the NT

emphasizes the duty of the human victim's duty to imitate the forgiveness of God. The two roles come together in the perfect picture of forgiveness, namely, in the cross of Christ. There, the God-man Jesus Christ, served as the human representative of sinful offenders, offering himself up on their behalf to satisfy God's justice (Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:22; 2 Cor 5:21). At the same time, he was also the primary offended party of all sins, therefore also representing human victims (Stott, 2006; Volf, 2006a; Jones, 1995).

### **Toward A Definition of Biblical Forgiveness**

At this point, we will now turn to defining Christian human forgiveness using the above survey on divine forgiveness as the basis of human forgiveness. Assuming an awareness of the seriousness of an offense, Christian human forgiveness is the offended party's unilateral and gracious act of releasing and liberating the offender from the sin or debt caused by that offense. It is based on love for the offender and constitutes a necessary but not sufficient condition of reconciliation. In other words, the author of the Christian human forgiveness is the offended as personal agent, and the forgiveness reflects God's forgiveness, depending not on any conditional behavior performed by the offender but only on the free decision of the offended. So, the Christian victim as a Godlike forgiver can forgive anybody at any time, or in any situation unilaterally but cannot be reconciled to the offender without the offender's repentance.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the major issues of divine and human forgiveness and a number of definitions of forgiveness, and conducted a general survey of biblical forgiveness. As God's image bearers, humans are necessarily relational beings. Relationships with others are an essential factor in human development, and so naturally, relational problems result in a lot of pain and suffering. In this respect, forgiveness is very important, because it is necessary for the restoration of broken relationships. In spite

of a strong consensus on the importance of forgiveness, the difficulty in forgiving can be related to erroneous notions of what it means to forgive (Cunningham, 1985; Worthington, 2006). We have already seen that scholars on both sides of the debate regarding the conditionality of forgiveness tend to focus on the circumstances surrounding the application of God's forgiveness, rather than on the atonement of Christ, which provides the ground for God's forgiveness. Therefore, the standard of whether forgiveness is understood conditionally or unconditionally depends on whether the forgiven party receives forgiveness with or without repentance, not on the particular manner in which forgiveness was offered. However, in the case of God's forgiveness, God, as the offended party, is the exclusive initiator and forgiveness is about the stance of the forgiver, not of the forgiven. Thus, the standard for determining whether human forgiveness is fundamentally conditional or unconditional should be based on whether the forgiver's forgiveness is *offered* conditionally or unconditionally. God's forgiveness in the OT is mainly conditional, and, therefore, is based in part on justice, because it is offered only to sinners after they complete atoning or repenting activities, such as sacrifice, confession, or the intercessory prayer of mediators. In contrast, the atonement of Christ is the ultimate display of the unconditional offer of God's forgiveness, because it demonstrates that God himself has provided the just atonement, which in the OT had to come from sinners, and, therefore, it indicates God took the initiative to make forgiveness possible even before a sinner repents. However, this divine forgiveness in the NT can be applied and granted to sinners only based on the condition of repentance and faith. Thus, God's forgiveness in the NT should be defined as unconditional and gracious in offer, but also conditional and just with regard to application. In spite of the differences between the unconditional and conditional aspects of divine forgiveness, Christians can be certain of one thing. There are the two parties, each with their respective roles, participating in the process of securing divine forgiveness: the divine Giver's unconditional offer of forgiveness and the human recipient's conditional attainment of forgiveness. Thus,

according to its final NT form, divine forgiveness entails an *unconditional offer* of forgiveness and the *conditional attainment* of forgiveness through repentance and faith.

Part of the reason why Christians have not previously recognized the distinctions being made here is because of a lack of appreciation for the development of concepts like forgiveness in the Bible. Therefore, we will turn next to consider how the concepts of divine and human forgiveness developed through the course of revelation history through a detailed examination of relevant passages in the OT, in chapter 2, and in the NT, in chapter 3.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF FORGIVENESS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD

Redemptive history in the Bible shows that revelation, such as the objects and modes of revelation, has developed progressively (Vos, 1975; Warfield, 2014; Kaiser, 1991). Warfield (2014) explains,

According to the Biblical representation, in the midst of and working confluently with the revelation which He has always been giving of Himself on the plane of Nature, God was making also from the very fall of man a further revelation of Himself on the plane of grace. In contrast with His general, natural revelation, in which all men by virtue of their very nature as men share, this special, supernatural revelation was granted at first only to individuals, then progressively to a family, a tribe, a nation, a race, until, when the fullness of time was come, it was made the possession of the whole world. It may be difficult to obtain from Scripture a clear account of why God chose thus to give this revelation of His grace only progressively; or, to be more explicit, through the process of a historical development. Such is, however, the ordinary mode of the Divine working: it is so that God made the worlds, it is so that He creates the human race itself, the recipient of this revelation, it is so that He builds up His kingdom in the world and in the individual soul, which only gradually comes whether to the knowledge of God or to the fruition of His salvation. As to the fact, the Scriptures are explicit, tracing for us, or rather embodying in their own growth, the record of the steady advance of this gracious revelation through definite stages from its first faint beginnings to its glorious completion in Jesus Christ. (p. 79)

Thus, in this chapter we will examine how forgiveness, which is an aspect of special revelation, that is, of “God’s communication of himself to particular people at particular times” for salvation (Allison, 2016, p. 198), also developed gradually throughout the OT.

The OT features a story about the relationship between God and Israel and

emphasizes the fact that every sin is ultimately an offense against God, and so God, the ultimate offended, is the only one who can forgive sin (Owen, 1966b; Kessler, 2013). This consistent teaching was deeply ingrained in the thought of the Jewish people of Jesus' age (Mark 2:7). Furthermore, contrary to the modern focus in forgiveness on the individual victims, the OT almost exclusively focuses on divine forgiveness and does not offer explicit instruction regarding human forgiveness (Griswold & Konstan, 2012; Rezetko et al., 2006; Redlich, 1937; Owen, 1966b). Instead, one can only find some implicit remarks and narrative references to human forgiveness in the OT. In this chapter, we will first examine divine forgiveness in the OT and will conclude with human forgiveness.

### **Divine Forgiveness in the Old Testament**

The OT focuses vastly more on divine forgiveness than on human forgiveness. Yet, as we saw in the previous chapter, understanding divine forgiveness is essential to a Christian understanding of human forgiveness, because human forgiveness should reflect divine forgiveness. We will begin this comparison in the OT. There, Israel is often described as a corporate entity (Exod 4:22; Hos 11:1; Ezek 16). Redlich (1937) explains the concept of corporate identity in Hebrew thought in this way: "A community to the Hebrew mind was not a mere collection of individuals, but a real entity in itself with claims upon each one of those who formed the body corporate" (p. 7). As a result, divine forgiveness in the OT is described as taking place between God and the corporate body of Israel. The focus of the OT on the vertical relationship between God and his people has existed from the time of creation.

### **From Creation to the Patriarchal Age**

**Relationships in creation.** The OT is a story about the covenantal relationship between God and his people from beginning to end (Gentry & Wellum, 2012; Kessler, 2013). From the beginning, relationships were integral to all of God's created order. The

creation story introduces several relationships: the relationship between Adam and Eve as husband and wife, the relationship between the human couple and God, and the relationship between humanity and creation (Kessler, 2013). The story portrays God as being almost exclusively interested in an active relationship with human beings, the pinnacle of creation. Although the creation story does not use covenantal language, God seems to be in a kind of covenantal relationship with Adam and Eve, his special creatures, and this covenantal relationship provides the context for divine forgiveness (VanGemeran, 1996; Gentry & Wellum, 2012). From creation, the relationship between God and man was to be characterized by love and obedience. The biblical view of humanity is radically different from its pagan counterpart. Pagans believed that human beings were doomed to live an unpleasant existence, because they had been created as slaves to serve the needs of the gods. By contrast, the Bible gives human beings the exalted status of being responsible free agents and covenantal partners with God (VanGemeran, 1996; Kessler, 2013; Barton, 2003).

However, man's relationship with God was not unbreakable. Even though God created the world very good, it was not created in an absolutely perfected form, because God's plan for the world from the beginning was to bring about the restoration of all things in the new heaven and new earth (VanGemeran, 1996; Fretheim, 2005). From the beginning, humans were designed to develop into a perfect state of consummated humanity that is "imperishable, glorious, powerful, and dominated by the Spirit" (1 Cor 15:42-53; Phil 3:20-21; Rom 8:11) (Allison, 2009, p. 13), like that of Jesus' resurrected status (John 20:11-28; Luke 24). Before they reached completion, human beings had the possibility of falling into depravity by eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17), which became the source of a broken relationship with God. Forgiveness, whether divine or human, is only necessary because of sin; in the new heavens and new earth there will no longer be any sin to be judged or forgiven (Rev

22:3).

**The natural law.** At the time of creation, all created things were signs of the Creator (Rom 2:20; Ps 19:1-4). Human beings could know God clearly by reading the book of creation. It was only at the time of creation that general revelation fulfilled its original role of revealing God perfectly. Humans were able to know God through nature, as well as through special revelation. Warfield (2014) states as follows:

Only in Eden has general revelation been adequate to the needs of man. Not being a sinner, man in Eden had no need of that grace of God itself by which sinners are restored to communion with Him, or of the special revelation of this grace of God to sinners to enable them to live with God. And not being a sinner, man in Eden, as he contemplated the works of God, saw God in the unclouded mirror of his mind with a clarity of vision, and lived with Him in the untroubled depths of his heart with a trustful intimacy of association, inconceivable to sinners. (pp. 75-76.)

Part of general revelation is the natural law of conscience (Rom 2:15), which deserves attention in order to understand forgiveness from creation to the patriarchal age. Even though those living between creation and the patriarchal age did not have Moses' written law, which is a special revelation, God had given them the natural law of conscience (Rom 2:15), which is a kind of general revelation. Puritan John Owen (1992) states that the law was engraved on Adam and Eve's hearts, but because of their failure to obey the law, God wrote it on the stone tablets given to Moses. Since the law was given to humanity in their sinless state (Owen, 1966b), it cannot be the final solution to the problem of sin. The law was not designed to overcome sin. Owen (1966b) states,

Conscience, if not seared, inexorably condemneth and pronounceth wrath and anger upon the soul that hath the least guilt cleaving to it.... And its constant voice is, that where there is guilt there must be judgment, Rom ii. 14, 15. Conscience naturally knows nothing of forgiveness; yes, it is against its very trust, work, and office to hear anything of it. (p. 387)

Thus, the law brings the sinner to justice and exposes sin to the sinner. The law can only lead the sinner to acknowledge the need for forgiveness through its function of conviction; it does not offer forgiveness itself. Early human history, up until Genesis 11, shows that, even though the natural law of conscience cannot bring divine forgiveness of



sins, it plays a role in curbing human depravity. For example, God judges Cain (Gen 4:7) and people in Noah's time (Gen 6:9-11) according to standards of the natural law, standards of "right and wrong assumed in conscience" (Waltke, 2001, p. 191). In this era, whenever human beings committed sin, God rebuked them or gave verbal teaching about the reason of punishment on the basis of their conscience before passing judgment (Gen 3:9-19; 4:9-15; 6:13-21; 18:17-32; 20:6-7). The purpose of this teaching is to help sinners acknowledge that they did wrong and to point them to repentance and the need for God's forgiveness (Smith, 1953; Krašovec, 1999). However, it seems that this natural law must have lost some of its influence little by little, since Genesis describes humanity's gradual descent into depravity and rebellion.

The fact that human beings as God's image bearers have the natural law implies that they are personal moral agents "who themselves act with deliberation and therefore are responsible for their actions" (Johnson, 2007, p. 274). As moral agents, human beings have the duty to keep the law and they have the right to be respected as personal agents in relationships with other moral agents. In Genesis, God emphasizes human responsibility for their thoughts and behavior by punishing sin and rewarding of human goodness (Gen 5:24; 7:1; 9:26-27).

**The fall.** Soon after creation, the possibility of human sin became a reality and sin destructively entered into all relationships in creation. Because of the fall, the story of a loving relationship between God and man turns into a story of separation and alienation (Gen 3:9-10), and the relationship between husband and wife and that between man and nature (Gen 3:17-18) are damaged as well (Gen 3:12). Adam and Eve respond to their fall into sin with attempts to justify themselves and evade their guilt (Gen 3:12-13) and shame (Gen 3:7-10). Stott (2006) writes,

Decision making belongs to the essence of our humanness. Sin is not only the attempt to be God; it is also the refusal to be human by shuffling off responsibility for our actions... the most common defense of the Nazi war criminals was that they were merely following orders. (p. 103)

However, Jamieson (2016) points out that the most fundamental problem facing Adam and Eve after they had fallen and had lost their fellowship with God is shame, which is a sense of inadequate or defective self (Gen 3:7-10). Christians have put an excessive emphasis on guilt, which points to having committed a wrong action, and so Jesus' atonement has been reduced to merely a solution for the sinner's guilt:

Something odd has happened in the first couple's experience of their disobedience. . . . Guilt is the associated experience of doing something wrong, like breaking a commandment. Our parents break a known law of God for which they should experience the associated feelings of guilt. But something different happens. Their hiding is not the classic response to guilt, but to shame. They don't try to hide their sin (we have no record of an attempt to tie the fruit back on the tree!); they try to hide themselves. In its etymology, shame literally refers to "covering." For a microsecond they "were like God" (*sicut Deus*) but reality reasserts itself and the greatest terror of all comes upon them and all of us who follow: reality no longer appears the same. The primordial parents now perceive everything differently. (p. 79)

With regard to forgiveness, shame becomes the reason for the offenders' archetypical unwillingness to admit and apologize for their wrongdoing (Jones, 1995), and, therefore, shame prevents offenders from accepting God's gracious forgiveness (Albers, 1996; Smedes, 1993; Jamieson, 2016).

At the same time, the fall serves as the introduction to the story of forgiveness through Jesus Christ. God gave Adam and Eve the promise that one of their children would solve the problem of sin (Gen 3:15; Luke 3:33-37). Krašovec (1999) points out that, in the primeval history (Gen 3-11), God's punishment never came without grace. Although Adam and Eve are cursed and expelled from the presence of God according to God's justice, God's grace is with them as well. By God's grace, Adam and Eve's death (Gen 2:17) is postponed and God provides them with garments of animal skin (Gen 3:21), which serve as a type of Jesus' future atonement. God curbed human depravity by positing enmity between the human seed and seed of Satan (Gen 3:15; VanGemenen, 1996; Vos, 1975). Later, God continues to show his grace by sparing Cain, who is punished, but also delivered from death because of God's gracious mark (Gen 4:15), by sparing Noah's family during the judgment of the Flood, and by curbing the future

rebellion of humanity by confusing the language of the people at the Tower of Babel. In the days leading up to Genesis 11, we can see that God bestowed forgiveness or punishment to humanity directly and that the amazing flood of God's grace was continually emphasized. In fact, in this era, sinners were not judged as harshly as they should have been (Krašovec, 1999; Gowan, 2010). This is because this age takes place at the beginning of the progress of redemption. North (1990) states "this is a basic principle of biblical jurisprudence: men's knowledge of God increases over time, and so does their personal and corporate responsibility" (p. 63).

In spite of God's grace toward sinful humanity, the early chapters of Genesis show that, since the fall, humans have gradually become more and more alienated from God, depraved humankind's rebellion against God grew increasingly serious, and the human life span became increasingly shorter (LaSor, Hubbard, & Bush, 1996). Throughout Genesis, human communities continued to increase in fulfillment of the creation mandate (Gen 1:28; 4:16-22), and human sinfulness deepened as well (Fretheim, 2005). For example, Cain murdered his brother (Gen 4:8), but Cain's decedent, Lamech, was an even more egregious murderer than Cain (Gen 4:23-24), since Cain asked God for help and had a sense of his sin, but Lamech depended on himself and lost all sense of sin (Vos, 1975). Lamech, who repaid the little violence of his attacker with the ultimate violence of murder, shows the typical human sinful reaction toward wrongdoing: the offender, although he commits a serious sin against the victim, wants to take the role of righteous and helpless victim rather than that of repentant or responsible offender (Gen 4:23-24). In the age of Noah, evil and violence were universal in the world (Gen 6:11); in Babel, human beings directly rebelled against God's commandment to fill the earth (Gen 11). Up until Genesis 12, the story of humanity shows the deepening of human depravity, but then the story line is changed with the appearance of Abraham.

**Abraham's election in redemptive history.** In Genesis 12, God's interest is focused on Abraham and his descendants who would go on to bless all people (Gen 12:1-3). With the introduction of Abraham into the story, the concept of faith is explicitly emphasized for the first time (Gen 15:6). Abraham follows in the "stream of grace," which began to flow from Seth's line according to the first promise (Gen 3:15) as a counterpart to the stream of sin from Cain's line since the fall (Boda, 2009, p. 24). The explicit emphasis on faith in the age of Abraham should be understood as an expression of God's children's faith in the first promise (Gen 3:15) that had implicitly existed since the time of Eve. For example, Noah who was righteous and blameless before God (Gen 6:9; 7:1) must have had faith in Him. God made an unconditional covenant with Abraham, according to his own sovereignty, but not because of Abraham's righteousness (Waltke, 2001). God's covenant with Abraham is unconditional in that God takes the initiative, but it is "not a unilateral covenant, in that Abraham's response in faith and faithfulness is essential and stipulations are articulated" (Boda, 2009, p. 25). Abraham and his children as God's covenantal partners are required to "keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice" (Gen 18:19). It means that God presents Abraham and his children with a much higher ethical standard than the pagans (Gen 17:1) and this ethical difference is symbolized physically by circumcision (Vos, 1975).

**God's forgiveness from creation to the patriarchal age.** From creation to the patriarchal era we see somewhat rudimentary revelations of divine forgiveness (Vos, 1975). Instead of the natural law in the human heart, God's forgiveness is given through the primeval worship system in the stream of grace, which began to flow alongside the stream of sin since the fall (Boda, 2009; Krašovec, 1999; Owen, 1966b). This is directly related to the fall; sin distorted the human ability to interpret the book of general revelation and, therefore, the importance of special revelation became more prominent (Erickson, 2013; Warfield, 2014). It is because of the fall that God begins to speak to the

particular family of Abraham in a new way, a way that would ultimately include all people (Gen 12:1-3; Gen 15). The first mark of God's forgiveness in the instituted worship system is found right after the first human being's sin. Although there is no clear evidence that Adam and Eve repented or received God's forgiveness for their disobedience, there are some clues that point to divine forgiveness in the first promise of grace (Gen 3:15). Owen (1966b) states that "forgiveness in God hath been discovered ever since the giving out of the first promise: God revealed it in a word of promise, or it could never have been known" (p. 387). Adam and Eve's garments were made of animal skin by God (Gen 3:21), which points to God's future forgiveness by covering sin through the sacrificial offering of animals and to the ultimate forgiveness revealed in the New Testament, that of Jesus Christ, the lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world (John 1:29) (Vos, 1975). Since that first promise (Gen 3:15), the revelation of God's forgiveness developed throughout redemptive history and is fully accomplished in the Lord Jesus Christ (Owen, 1966b).

Genesis 4 reveals one of the most important evidences of divine forgiveness in the rudimentary sacrificial offerings of Abel and Cain. The fact that God accepts Abel's sacrifice implies that there is divine forgiveness, because without the forgiveness of sin, no sinful human can have communion with God (Owen, 1966b). Since the fall "God hath pardoned our sins, and accepted our persons thereon; for without that, none of our worship or service would please him or be accepted with him" (Owen, 1966b, p. 464). Thus, sacrificial rituals in the OT did not begin with the Mosaic Law; rather, they already existed in rudimentary form in Cain and Abel's offerings (Vos, 1975; Daly, 2009).

Furthermore, one can see God's forgiveness in two Abrahamic narratives: the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:16-33) and the story of Abimelech (Gen 20). In those two narratives Abraham serves as a mediator of God's forgiveness to sinners (Boda, 2009; Griswold & Konstan, 2012), which is consistent with God's purpose in calling Abraham to be a blessing for all nations (Gen 12:1-3; 22:18).

First, in the story of Sodom, Abraham acts a mediator or prophet who, upon hearing God's plan to destroy the city (Amos 3:7), pleads repeatedly for God's forgiveness for the wicked city (Gen 18:25). God answers that he will forgive (כַּשְׂמִי) the city on behalf of the righteous people living in the city (Gen 18:26). Genesis 18:19 shows that Abraham is able to act as a mediator because of his intimate relationship with God, for in the Hebrew text the sentence 'I have chosen him' should be translated as "I have an intimate relationship with him" (Waltke, 2001, p. 269). So, on the basis of Abraham's intimate relationship with God, Abraham and his descendants should keep the way of the Lord by living with righteousness and justice (Gen 18:19). Through Abraham's questions, it is clear that Abraham believes that God is the righteous judge of all the earth and that the righteous should be saved from punishment (Gen 18:25). For Abraham, God's forgiveness seems to depend on human goodness rather than on God's decision of grace (Krašovec, 1999). The story concludes with Lot's family being saved from punishment, thereby demonstrating that God's forgiveness ultimately depends on no one but himself. Genesis 19:29 demonstrates that Lot received God's forgiveness because of his relationship with Abraham, rather than because of his own righteousness. The subsequent story of incest between Lot and his two daughters is further proof of the family's lack of righteousness (Gen 19:30-38). This story demonstrates that God's forgiveness in this era, seen here as salvation from judgement, may be granted on behalf of a mediator as God's covenantal partner and may be given to a whole community by virtue of a few righteous people (Boda, 2009).

The story of Abimelech in Genesis 20 gives us further insights regarding the role of restitution and the evidence of behavioral change in relation to divine forgiveness (Boda, 2009). In this account, Abraham intercedes again, asking God to forgive innocent Abimelech, who is threatened with divine punishment as a result of Abraham's lie. Abraham lied to Abimelech, saying that Sarah was his sister, rather than his wife. As a result, Abimelech pursues Sarah to take her as his wife. Thus, God warns Abimelech that

divine judgement will be on his family (vv. 5-6). This story shows that God's people can bring a curse upon innocent people when they sin. Abraham had committed a similar sin in Genesis 12 when he told the same lie to the Egyptian king who then took Sarah to his palace. In this case, the king and his family were punished, rather than forgiven (Gen 12:17). However, in the narrative of Abimelech, "a clear process for obtaining forgiveness is articulated" (Boda, 2009, p. 28). First, there was repentance involving behavioral change on the basis of the fear of God seen in Abimelech's prompt response of returning Sarah. Second, this story demonstrates the principle of restitution; Abimelech gave Abraham and Sarah livestock, servants, and silver to cover his offense (vv. 14-16). Last, God granted forgiveness to Abimelech through the intercession of his prophet, Abraham (Waltke, 2001).

In conclusion, examples of rudimentary divine forgiveness through a form of primitive worship (Gen 3:21; 4:3-5; 8:20) can be seen since the fall (13:4; 15:9-10; 26:25; 35:7). However, upon the introduction of Abraham in chapter 12, a shift takes place during the patriarchal age as God's forgiveness begins to be given to sinners through God's covenantal partner or prophet, who acts as mediator. This is a continuing pattern in the following stages. Conditional forgiveness, the primary form of divine forgiveness in the OT, already seems to be planted in this age, because only those who shows signs of repentance receive God's forgiveness.

### **God's Forgiveness in the Mosaic Period**

The most prominent features of divine forgiveness in the Mosaic era were found in the written law and in the sacrificial tabernacle rites, which are the foundation of the whole OT. While God had required the patriarchs to live by a moral standard distinct from the surrounding nations, they shared many cultural and environmental features with these other people (Vos, 1975). However, in the Mosaic age, Israel was organized as a nation and needed to be differentiated from other nations by having their own theocentric

law and culture (Vos, 1975). Although the Mosaic covenant was established on the basis of Israel's covenant relationship with God (Exod 19:4-6), it was a conditional covenant which could be broken by the breach of its laws (Gowan, 2010). As a result, with this contextual need, having a particular moral standard on the basis of written law, the concept of sin was clarified and heightened remarkably.

**Sin in the Mosaic age.** To understand God's forgiveness in the Mosaic age, one will first have to grasp the concept of sin as the object of divine forgiveness (Anderson, 2010). In this era, the concept of sin was developed with the introduction of the written Law. First, sin was understood in relationships. The Decalogue defines sin in terms of Israel's covenantal relationship with God and with other humans. Sin was always regarded as relational in nature, because it is about what happens between two parties (Carson, 2008). Second, in the Mosaic age, Israel's sin was described as defilement or pollution, which required purification. Thus, in the Torah, the concepts of sin and uncleanness overlap throughout (Romerowski, 2006). For example, a sin offering was required for actual sins or physical defilement and was also called a purification offering. Third, sin was considered not just personal, but collective. Sin, or uncleanness, was understood to be a barrier in Israel's personal and communal relationships with God while also threatening the solidarity of Israel as one community of God (Hartley, 1992). This is related to the special context in this age in which Israel as God's nation was to have unity within community to reach Canaan. Sin is described as a pollutant or a contagious virus, which injures others, as well as the sinner himself (Boda, 2009; Balentine, 2002; Daly, 1978). For example, because of Korah's rebellion, all the families of the rebellious were punished with destruction (Num 16:22-33), and, thus, Korah's sin threatened the lives and solidarity of all Israel by making divisions among them (Num 16:41-49). Fourth, sin is understood as a burden or weight for the sinner to bear (Lev 16:22, 24:15; Num 30:15). On the Day of Atonement, the scapegoat served as an



amazing symbol of vicarious atonement as it bore the weight of Israel's sin and carried it into the desert, which is a symbol of oblivion (Anderson, 2010). These various aspects of sin show how pervasively sin affects God's people and their relationship with him.

Thus, in the Mosaic era, sin had to be dealt with seriously, at least in part because of its far-reaching effects on human beings. Furthermore, with the introduction of a better and clearer revelation of God in the written law came increased human responsibility (North, 1990). Thus, the consequences of sin resulted in severe penalty, such as death, being cut off, incurring guilt, or suffering (Sklar, 2005). The first two penalties refer to death, which is the punishment for intentional and unforgivable sins (Sklar, 2005). The Pentateuch prescribes a death penalty of stoning (Lev 20:2, 27; 24:16, 23; Num 15:35) or burning (Lev 20:9-16; 24:17, 21). In fact, the penalty of cutting a person off refers to excommunication from the community (Exod 30:33, 38), premature death (Exod 31:14; Num 4:18-20), and extinction of the sinners' name in the lineage of God's people (Num 4:18-20); thus, in the end, all these lead to death (Sklar, 2005). As a result, we find that in most cases, the penalty for sin is death without forgiveness.

However, there are some less serious sins in which the sinner incurs guilt, but can be forgiven through a prescribed ritual. The degree of a sin's seriousness is determined primarily by the sinner's intention (Num 15:25-31; 35:11, 15-25) and the impact that the sin had on the community (Boda, 2009; Sklar, 2005). Boda (2009) describes the three categories of sins according to the intention of the sinner as "inadvertent errors that can be forgiven/purified, deliberate errors that can be forgiven, and defiant sin that cannot be forgiven" (pp. 53-54). Thus, unintentional sins and some intentional sins can be forgiven through sin and guilt offerings. According to the Mosaic Law (Num 15:22-31; 35:11-34) only unintentional sins are forgiven through offerings. However, some intentional sins, whose impact on the community is relatively minimal, such as stealing or lying (Lev 6:2-3), can be forgiven through rituals as well. While the Law makes provision for forgiveness in such situations, if the sinner does not make

atonement through the required ritual, they will be punished with death (Boda, 2009; Sklar, 2005). In fact, God's ultimate goal in punishing his people, Israel, is not punishment itself, but always reconciliation through repentance (Exod 33:1-6; Deut 4:25-30; 30:1-5). In the Pentateuch, a person was required to pay for his or her sin with atoning sacrifices and different sins required different kinds of sacrifices to repudiate the wrongful act and the values that permitted it (Patterson, 2001; Konstan, 2010).

**Atonement.** According to the Mosaic Law, the Hebrew term **כִּפָּר**, meaning atonement, ransom, or bribe was designed to bring about reconciliation of a broken relationship through compensation and was necessary as a prerequisite to forgiveness of sins and purification of uncleanness (Sklar, 2005; Boda, 2009; Hill & James III, 2004). Sklar (2005) defines the noun 'atonement' (**כִּפָּר**) as follows:

A legally or ethically legitimate payment which delivers a guilty party from a just punishment that is the right of the offended party to execute or to have executed. The acceptance of this payment is entirely dependent upon the choice of the offended party, it is a lesser punishment than was originally expected, and its acceptance serves both to rescue the life of the guilty as well as to appease the offended party, thus restoring peace to the relationship. (p. 60)

Thus, according to the priestly rituals, atonement is a sort of repentance in which the offender restores peace with the offended party by appeasing, covering the hurt, and thereby, being released from obligation of guilt. Groves (as cited in Hill & James III, 2004) states that because atonement always resulted in preventing the wrath of God from consuming Israel, "sometimes the act of appeasing the wrath of God is explicitly called atonement" and its result was expressed as "forgiveness, cleansing, consecration, or redemption" (p. 66). The verb 'atone' (**כִּפָּר**) is also used in non-cultic contexts and human relationships described in the Bible (Morris, 1984). For example, the Israelites are to pay "atonement money" to ransom their life (Exod 30:16), Phineas made atonement for Israel by killing the offensive sinners (Num 25:1-13), David asks the Gibeonites how he can atone for Saul's sin (2 Sam 21:3), and Jacob pacifies his brother with gifts (Gen 32:20) (Morris, 1984, p. 58). Therefore, atonement should be regarded as a legitimate duty of the

offender and, in response, the victim must decide whether he will accept or reject it. Because of the atonement offered, divine forgiveness in this era resulted in the mitigation of the original punishment (Sklar, 2005; Boda, 2009). Consequently, divine forgiveness in Israel's ritual law did not exclude God's justice, because it was granted only on the condition of restoring the broken relationship through atonement.

**The way of atonement: Five types of offerings.** God provided a system of offerings as a means of atonement for Israel's sins. Leviticus 1-7 describes five different offerings: burnt offerings, cereal offerings, peace offerings, sin offerings, and guilt offerings. These offerings are not new but "submit an already existing practice to the proper understanding of the relationship between God and his people" (Hill & James III, 2004, p. 42). Offerings were not only a symbol or sign, but also a practical means of atonement as a type of worship. Since Adam's sin, no human being can have communion with God without covering his or her sin through prescribed sacrifices. The burnt offering, cereal offering, and peace offering were voluntary offerings, which seem to have been a part of regular worship "as expressions of praise and homage to God" (Boda, 2009, p. 60). They are described as a pleasing aroma or gift to the Lord (Lev 1:9, 13, 17; 2:2, 9; 3:5, 16) (Romerowski, 2006). By contrast, sin and guilt offerings were mandatory, because they are more directly related to atonement for specific sins. In this era, continuation of God's presence "depends on observance of his laws, including those that directly relate to the cultic center by regulating the ritual system" (Gane, 2005, p. 12).

First, the burnt offering (Lev 1; 6:8-13) was primarily an expression of worship and strong covenantal communion with God by attracting God's attention (Boda, 2009; Baletine, 2002). However, in order to worship and to be accepted by God, the Israelites needed to atone for their general sinfulness. Thus, burnt offerings, though voluntary, served the function of atoning for sin (Lev 1:4) or "the general sinful disposition of the presenter" (Hartley, 1992, p. 19). In the case of burnt offerings, offerers directly took part

in the sacrificial process by choosing the animal, laying their hands on it, slaughtering, skinning, cutting, and washing the animal, and then handing it over to the priest who burned the sacrifice as an agent of the offeror. In this way, the offeror was actively involved in the process, and “he gave symbolic expression to his recognition that his sin merited the severest punishment. He himself performed the act which set forth the truth that he deserved death” (Morris, 1984, p. 48).

Second, the cereal offering (Lev 2: 6:14-23) was a sacrifice usually offered along with animal sacrifices, such as the burnt offering or peace offering. It was also commonly offered by the poor as an “independent sacrifice that functions to duplicate the manifold purposes of the burnt offering” (Milgrom, 2004, p. 26). Although Leviticus 2 does not mention an atoning function for the cereal offering, other passages such as Leviticus 14:20, 5:11-13 and Ezekiel 45:15, 17 clearly demonstrate that the cereal offering can atone for sins.

Third, the peace offering (Lev 3; 7:11-21) also functioned as atonement (Ezek 45:15, 17) and was offered for the purpose of thanksgiving, confession, or fulfilling a vow (Lev 7:12, 16). (Romerowski, 2006; Kiuchi, 1999). This offering ends with eating a meal in the presence of God, which is a symbol of special communion with God (Exod 24:10).

Fourth, sin (or purification) offerings (Lev 4:1-5:13; 6:24-30) were mandatory for restoring normalcy through atonement for specific sins or uncleanness such as unintentional sins (4:2, 13), careless oaths (5:1, 4), and defilement of the sanctuary caused by such sins (Lev 15:31; 16:19). The primary purpose of the sin offering was the removal of guilt of unintentional sin or uncleanness in order to obtain forgiveness or purification (Gane, 2005; Romerowski, 2006). The cost of each sin offering depended upon the person’s position in the community. The person who committed an unintentional sin was expected to recognize his guilt (Lev 4:14, 23, 28; 5:2, 3) and confess the sin (Lev 5:5) before making atonement through this sacrificial offering.

Milgrom (1976) states that the recognition of guilt in Levitical rituals did not exclude emotional grief, qualms, and remorse and so should be translated as feeling guilt (p. 9). Through repentance and confession, the sinner was to reject the old sinful identity and proclaim her new identity (Redlich, 1937; Hayes, 1998). As part of the sin offering, blood from the sacrifice was applied to objects in the sanctuary, such as the veil and the horns of the altar, because of their expiatory or atoning function (Lev 4:7, 18, 25, 30, 34; 17:11; 16:18) (Gane, 2005).

Fifth, the guilt (or reparation) offering (Lev 5:14-6:7; 7:1-10; Num 5:6-8) had to “be offered when reparable faults had been committed” (Romerowski, 2006, p. 21). This offering was needed primarily on account of unintentional sin against holy things (Lev 5:15). Before the sacrifice, the guilty sinners would acknowledge their guilt and finish making full restitution for what they had failed to do, including contributing an additional fifth of the original value to the priest as a representative of God. Thus, the offering followed in order from recognition, to restitution, to atonement through offering, and then forgiveness. This order shows that, in this era, God’s forgiveness is only for Israelites who have taken responsibility for their guilt. The guilt offering also applied to cases in which one intentionally sinned against a neighbor, but the offense was considered minor (Lev 6:2-3). The consequence for serious sins, such as intentional murder (Num 35:16-21) or defiant sin (Num 15:30-31), was death and there was no chance for atonement (Boda, 2009). The guilt offering in particular also shows how human forgiveness is related to divine forgiveness in the Mosaic law (Lev 6:1-6). According to Numbers 5:6-8, an echo of Leviticus 6:1-7, the guilty party could only make a guilt offering, seeking forgiveness, after they had confessed and provided restitution for the sin. In cases in which there was not a human agent to receive restitution on behalf of the victim, God was to receive payment on their behalf. Thus, in such cases, human forgiveness seems to be a prerequisite for divine forgiveness and God is able to stand in the place of the human victim. The priests, as the pastoral and social leaders of

God's people, were responsible to monitor abuses in human relationships within the society, because, before conducting rituals, they would have had to check if the offender had completed the repentance and reconciliation process.

Lastly, in addition to the five regular offerings, there was another annual ritual for the collective forgiveness of sins called the Day of Atonement (Lev 16; 23:26-32; Num 29:7-11). On this day, two male goats were prepared for the atonement of the sins and uncleanness of all of Israel. One was offered for the purification of the holy place, the tent of meeting (Lev 16:16), and the altar (Lev 16:19), which had been defiled by all the sins of Israel. The other was a scapegoat offered for the forgiveness of all of Israel's sins (Lev 16:21). The Israelites were to understand that their sins were taken away completely through the scapegoat that bore all their sins; the high priest confessed all the sins over the goat, while laying his hands on it, and then it was sent into the desert and disappeared (Morris, 1984). On the Day of Atonement, the sanctuary and camp were cleansed from all sins, except for those who had committed defiant and serious sins (Boda, 2009). God's forgiveness through sacrificial rituals was only offered for "unintentional, unconscious or reparable faults," (Num 15:26-30) (Romerowski, 2006, p. 21); if sinners did not make atonement through the required sacrifices, they were put to death. Further, the existence of the Day of Atonement implies that "normal offering of sacrifices did not cover all the sins people committed" and, so, points to the true day of atonement at the cross (Morris, 1984, p. 73). Thus, the forgiveness offered through sacrifice is just forgiveness, not cheap grace, because it mitigates the original punishment of death by making atonement (Boda, 2009; Bash, 2007, 2011).

In conclusion, the sacrificial laws show that although God is willing to forgive, he is just and holy and does not overlook sins. In the context of redemptive history, the OT visible ritual performances serve as a shadow of the forgiveness that is offered in the gospel (Owen, 1966b). By participating directly in the explicit ritual, which ended with the priest's proclamation of God's forgiveness, the people of Israel were certain that their

sins had been forgiven by God (Balthasar, 1984). Thus, this entire system provided strong assurance of the securing of divine forgiveness through explicit, symbolic evidences, such as the scapegoat or the priest's proclamation. Being the recipients of divine forgiveness, the Israelites needed the assurance of God granting it. However, according to the OT, God's forgiveness was granted only to those who recognized their guilt (Lev 4:13, 22, 27; 5:2-5, 17, 19; Num 5:6, 7), confessed (Lev 5:5; 16:21; 26:40; Num 5:6-7), and made restitution (Lev 5:14-19; 6:1-7) (Hastings, 1911). Thus, God's forgiveness through rituals is a conditional or "just" forgiveness, given only to the deserving. The deepened conviction and repentance of sins through these ritual processes must have been necessary for the sinner's assurance of divine forgiveness; those who knew the seriousness of their sin, recognized they were in need of forgiveness and the rituals helped them receive assurance. The process of repentance also served as an educational purpose by developing the offender's conscience and making him or her more sensitive to sin (Burnside, 2003; Firmage, Weiss, & Welch, 1990; Boda, 2009; Gane, 2005). "By the daily observance of the ritual laws, a person sanctifies himself, developing a noble character that is in accord with the moral law" (Firmage et al., 1990, p. 188). Nevertheless, the conclusion that God's forgiveness revealed in the OT is conditional does not mean that human repentance brings about God's forgiveness, since God is the only sovereign subject of divine forgiveness. Rather, it shows that God's forgiveness was granted after repentance. This is largely so, because it is God himself who provided the way of divine forgiveness through various rituals, even before sinful Israel recognized the need of repentance and forgiveness (Sklar, 2005; Gane, 2005). Even though the sacrificial system was not the final form of God's revelation of forgiveness, "every sacrifice and every lustration proclaimed the principle of grace" (Vos, 1975, p. 129). Just as in the gospel it is God himself who presents sinners with forgiveness, so it is God who offered forgiveness in response to rituals he established. God's forgiveness through rituals shows that sinners can only receive forgiveness through responsible repentance.

**Narratives of God's forgiveness.** The Torah records many stories of God's forgiveness in which Israel commits sins of rebellion, complaining, and unbelief. God offers forgiveness through a mediator or prophet (Num 12:1-2), such as in the case of the complaint in Taberah (Num 11:1-3), the grumbling in Kibroth Hattaavah (Num 11:4-35), the golden calf (Exod 32-32; Deut 9:6-29), Miriam and Aaron's sin against Moses (Num 12:1-16), Korah's rebellion (Num 16), the bronze snake (Num 21: 4-9), and the report from the twelve spies (Num 13-14). Israel broke their covenant with God continually and whenever they sinned, there was divine wrath (Num 11:10, 33; 12:9; 16:46; 25:2; 32:14; Deut 4:25; 9:18-22) as the NT affirms (Eph 2:3; Rom 2:5; 9:22; Rev 6:16). Among the record of Israel's sins, the idolatry of the golden calf (Exod 32-34) is the most serious offense of Moses' time. Thus, we will examine the golden calf narrative in some detail, as an archetypal example of God's forgiveness in this era.

In the narrative of the golden calf (Exod 32-34; Num 9:6-29) Moses prays four times for forgiveness for the people of Israel who have committed the most defiant sin of idolatry (Exod 32:11-13; 31-32; 33:12-18; 34:8-9). In his first prayer (Exod 32: 11-13) Moses asks God for forgiveness in the midst of his burning wrath and plan to destroy all of Israel, and God turns away his wrath and repents (נחם) of his first plan to destroy the people (verse 14). The verb נחם ("repent" or "change the mind") denotes that God apparently forgives Israel because of Moses' prophetic intercession (Widmer, 2004; Hyatt, 1980). Widmer (2004) points out that "although Moses' prayer presents a God who is genuinely open to change, it has to be qualified, that according to the Old Testament, YHWH is said to change His mind only in the context of an intended judgment against sinful Israel who either show themselves genuinely repentant and/or are covered by prophetic intercession" (p. 122). So in this case, God forgave Israel on the basis of Moses' prophetic intercession. However, right after this first exchange, God still makes Moses, as God's representative, execute punishment by killing three thousand people who had committed idolatry (Exod 32:25-29). As a result, God's forgiveness



through Moses' first intercession seems to be a mitigation of the full corporate punishment, because only three thousand of the people were killed (Sklar, 2005; Boda, 2004).

Nevertheless, after this punishment is carried out, Moses' mentions the need for seeking atonement (Exod 32:30) and forgiveness of sins (Exod 32:32), which shows that the relationship between God and Israel had not yet been fully restored (Widmer, 2004; Gibson & Gibson, 2013). In Exodus 32:30, Moses says to Israel "You yourselves have committed a great sin; and now I am going up to the LORD, perhaps I can make atonement (כִּפֶּר) for your sin". As mentioned in the previous chapter, the verb כִּפֶּר is usually used in cultic atonement as the prerequisite for divine forgiveness and the purpose of atonement is always restoration of a broken relationship. In verse 32, Moses prays that God forgive (נָשָׂא) Israel's sin of idolatry. In this respect, it seems that Israel "does not contain an assurance of forgiveness (in the sense of cancelling sins)" at this point, even though God had laid aside his consuming anger and Israel had recognized their great sin (32:30) (Widmer, 2004, p. 139). This is the reason that Moses' second prayer (Exod 32:31-32) is needed.

In his second prayer, Moses confesses Israel's sin honestly: "Alas, this people has committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for themselves" (32:31). Stuart (2006) states that "biblically, confession of sin (being entirely honest with God in stating its nature and extent) is part of true repentance; the person who understates his sin is not really demonstrating repentance to God" (p. 684). Moses, like Jesus (Rom 5:6) or Paul (Rom 9:3), stands in the place of Israel as the offender, in order to obtain God's forgiveness; he offers to give up his life saying, "if You will, forgive their sin and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written" (v. 32) (Durham, 1987; Childs, 1974). Here, Moses serves as a type of Christ by pointing ahead to the vicarious atonement of Christ in the NT. Moses' second prayer was again successful, because God forgives Israel and says that Israel would be led to Canaan (32:34). God's answer to

Moses' second prayer shows that God is merciful and forgiving in allowing Israel to enter into the Promised Land, while also acting in justice and punishing the people in a lesser degree than complete destruction or rejection by striking them with a plague (32:35), imposing the responsibility of its sin on Israel in the future (32:34), and refusing to travel with Israel with his personal presence (33:1-3). So, after the second prayer, God's answer shows again that at this time in revelation history, God's "forgiveness does not eliminate the punishment of the offending generation" (Boda, 2004, p. 42). Finally, the people of Israel show total repentance by mourning their sin and putting off their ornaments (33:4-6). For Israelites who were raised in Egyptian pagan culture, jewelry often had images of gods for apotropaic purposes, and so the removal of jewelry was "primarily a matter of eliminating the paganism" (Garrett, 2013, p. 643).

Moses' repetitive prayer for God's forgiveness symbolically emphasizes the seriousness of the offense by implying that it takes time even for God to forgive in this breaking of the most important commandments (Exod 20:3-5). In response to Moses' first prayer, God withdrew his burning wrath, and after the second prayer, his forgiveness progressed further when he promised to send Israel an angel who would lead them into the Promised Land. Furthermore, Israel's repentance developed as well—after Moses' first prayer they began to realize cognitively that they had committed a serious sin (32:30), and after his second prayer, they came to a state of emotional and volitional repentance (33:1-10). God's punishment expressed in anger (32:10), execution (32:27), plague (32:35), and estrangement (32:34; 33:1-3) must have propelled Israel to the place of acknowledging their sin and repenting (Garrett, 2013). Israel's attitude toward Moses also shifts—at first, they responded to Moses with disrespect (Exod 32:1), but they changed in their attitude and behavior to the same mediator (Exod 33:7-10). After Moses' second prayer, "no longer do they bow down to an idol, but stand in awe of YHWH and bow to Him" (Exod 33:10) (Widmer, 2004, p. 144). Thus, the people of Israel seemed to reach a state of complete repentance involving cognitive, emotional, willful, and

behavioral change.

Even so, God still withdrew his presence from the rebellious people and the tent of meeting was placed outside, rather than within the camp (Exod 33:3, 5, 7). Stuart (2006) states that, although generally in the OT God's action of withholding his presence is a serious punishment, which implies unforgiveness of sins, God's limited presence through an angelic figure in this passage represents God's mercy in not destroying this corporate group of sinful human beings in their entirety (33:2). It means that God cannot relate to Israel in the same way that he did before they committed this serious sin. "God's love, protection and care for his people, however mitigated, did not cease" (Stuart, 2006, p. 694).

However, although God forgave Israel twice, the relationship between God and his people is not reconciled fully yet (Widmer, 2004), so Moses intercedes a third time (Exod 33:12-23) with the purpose of restoring God's personal presence with Israel. In his third prayer, Moses does not request forgiveness, but full reconciliation between God and Israel. God answers by assuring him that he will be with Israel personally (Exod 33:14, 17), not because of Moses' goodness or ability, but because of his own grace and mercy (Exod 33:19; 34:6-7) (Stuart, 2006). God proclaims: "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion" (33:19). Garrett (2013) states about Exodus 33:19, "the point is that because God chose Israel to receive his compassion, they could not escape it if they wanted to" (pp. 640-651). Thus, God's people seek God's forgiveness never on the grounds of their worthiness but only on the grounds of God's unilateral gracious decision (Stuart, 2006; Garrett, 2013).

This narrative suggests that there can be various stages or degrees of forgiveness which develop as time passes and the attitude of the offender can affect the progress of forgiveness or reconciliation. However divine forgiveness ultimately depends on God as the forgiver. Furthermore, human offenders should always do their best to be reconciled to God with humble and genuine repentance. Moses asks God to show him his

glory as evidence and reassurance that the intimate presence and favor, which God had shown his people in the past, had been fully restored (33:18-21) (Stuart, 2006). Exodus 34 is about the renewal of Israel's covenant with God. The phrase, 'like the former ones' (vv. 1, 4), implies that the covenant would be renewed to the way it was before the idolatry (Janzen, 1997). In this context of covenant renewal, God makes an important self-revelation of his character of forgiveness.

Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations. (Exod 34:6-7)

Many Christian writings refer to this passage as evidence of God's forgiving character. However, this passage is actually revealing that God forgives and punishes (34:6-7). In other words, God is both gracious and just in his dealings with humanity (Gowan, 2010). In fact, as we examined above, God did not forgive Israel for "free." Instead, to receive God's forgiveness, they had to suffer some of the consequences of their sin in the death of three thousand people and a plague. These mitigated penalties seem to serve as atonement (כִּפּוּר) rituals, or "a legally or ethically legitimate payment which delivers a guilty party from a just punishment," which, in this case, would be the destruction of all Israel (Sklar, 2005, p. 60). For instance, there is a parallel story within this passage where God ordered Moses and the judges to kill idolaters, and Phinehas obeys by executing a couple found guilty of this sin during the time of the plague (Stuart, 2006). God says that Phinehas' action assuaged his divine wrath (Num 25:11) and made atonement (כִּפּוּר) for Israel (Num 25:13). In these narratives, God's punishment itself seems to serve as an atonement satisfying God's anger. At the same time, the reference to God's punishment extending to third and fourth generations can be understood as one family living together in the same time period, but emphasizes the serious effects of sin and the fact that human beings are affected by one another's sin since they are relational

beings (Gowan, 2010). By contrast, God's blessing is much greater and longer lasting than his punishment. Gowan (2010) states that "while iniquity is visited upon the present, however, the Lord's steadfast love extends to the thousandth generation" (p. 20). Thus, this passage emphasizes both God's merciful, forgiving character as well as his justice, showing that God's forgiveness is not opposed to punishment (Gowan, 2010; Garrett, 2013).

In spite of the previously established reconciliation with God, Moses, in his fourth prayer (34:8-9), asks for God to forgive Israel and to be personally present with them. However, this should be understood as a renewal of the covenant, rather than a separate request for forgiveness and reconciliation. Garrett (2013) explains the following:

This does not mean that he is still not convinced of God's willingness to go with Israel or that he doubts God's compassion—that would be a very odd response to the revelation. To the contrary, he understands these things better than ever. But because he now has such a clearer vision of God, he also has a clearer apprehension of the repugnance of evil and of the need for the mercy of God. As such, he can only appeal again for grace. (pp. 653-654)

The same proclamation of forgiveness was repeatedly applied in different contexts throughout Israel's history (Num 14:18; Deut 7:9-11; Neh 9:17; Jon 4:2). We have just examined the golden calf story as an example of divine forgiveness in Moses' era. However, other narratives about God's forgiveness during this era follow the same pattern: Israel's sin; God's wrath, Moses' wrath, or both; Moses' intercession or Israel's repentance or both; and God's forgiveness demonstrated in a mitigated punishment. At times, one or two aspects may be omitted and sometimes the cycle of Moses' intercession and the people's repentance is repeated and God's forgiveness is delayed, depending on the seriousness of the sin. For example, in the case of the bronze snake (Num 21: 4-9), there is no evidence of divine anger; Israel sins by complaining and being impatient, God punishes with fiery snakes, Israel confesses the sin, Moses prays for them, and God forgives by providing the bronze snake for their salvation. However, when the writer of Psalm 78 mentions the sin of Numbers 21:4-9, he portrays God as angry (Ps 78:18-21).

Thus, although some stages in the cycle may be omitted, the basic story line in various narratives of divine forgiveness are similar. When Israel received God's forgiveness in the desert, Moses and Aaron effectively mediated on their behalf (Lev 16; Num 16:47-48, 12: 11-13) rather than the people admitting culpability themselves (Boda, 2009). In fact, there are very few narratives about divine forgiveness in which we see sinners confess their sin, and when they do, they seem to be confessing to Moses, not to God.

Some cases show that the sinners' repentance is not effective at all in securing divine forgiveness (Num 14:39-45; Deut 1:41-45; 3:23-26; Exod 33:1-6). While in this era, the importance of the offender's responsibility was emphasized through some kind of atonement (כִּפּוּר) and punishment, the mediating figure's role seemed to be regarded as more important than the sinners' own repentance. In most cases in this era, "forgiveness and atonement often involves mitigated punishment, that is, the people still suffer, but they do not receive the full measure of judgment that they deserve" (Boda, 2009, p. 95).

**A summary of God's forgiveness in the Mosaic age.** In conclusion, God's forgiveness in this era is focused on the nation of Israel during the Exodus from Egypt on the basis of the written law and so, it is more national or communal, than individualistic. In this era, the idea that sins result in disaster and suffering becomes clearer than in the previous era (Lev 26:14-45; Deut 28) and this theme continues throughout the OT. Although God is characterized as loving and just (Exod 34:6-7; Num 14:18), in reality God's justice and wrath are emphasized in his conditional forgiveness offered on the basis of the sinner's repentance or mediators' petition. God chose Israel and rescued them out of Egypt because of his unconditional love (Deut 7:6-8). However, he is also a just God who accomplishes justice on behalf of the weak (Deut 10:17-18; Exod 23:9) and never fails to punish sin (Deut 5:9-11; 29:20; Num 14:32-35). Thus, despite God's unconditional love of election, his love toward the people of Israel is expressed as conditional on the basis of obedience (Deut 28; Lev 26:3-39), for the purpose of

discipline (Deut 30:1-20) and to foster holiness. God's conditional love for his people for the purpose of discipline is the same in the NT (John 15:7-10) (Carson, 2002). In this regard, justice is emphasized more than love in the Torah. In the OT, God provides a way for forgiveness through rituals and intercessors such as Moses and priests. "By providing for forgiveness through sacrifice, YHWH mercifully opened the way for pardon even before the sinner recognized his offense" (Gane, 2005, p. 51). The biblical conception of forgiveness in this era is different from the later conception, since it is expressed as the mitigation, rather than the eradication, of the expected punishment or penalty (Boda, 2009; Sklar, 2005, Redlich, 1937).

### **Settlement and Monarchy Periods**

We will now turn to examining divine forgiveness during the period from Joshua's leadership to the time of the fall of Jerusalem. First, I will examine the historical books of Joshua, Judges, and 1 and 2 Samuel, then I will look at the prophetic books written before or in the early period of the exile. The distinguishing mark of God's forgiveness in this age is that repentance becomes the central condition for divine forgiveness. Repentance is the primary issue in the pre-exilic historical books; the judgment of the exile came because of Israel's failure to repent of their apostasy and not because of the apostasy itself (Boda and Smith, 2006; Klein, 1979; Knoppers & McConville, 2000). In addition, the book of Kings focuses on the importance of repentance, because it explains why Israel went into exile (House, 1995). Even though repentance is the central condition of divine forgiveness in this era, the call to repentance should also be seen as a gift of God offered on the foundation of God's gracious character and his promise to Israel (1 Sam 12:22; 2 Sam 7:16; 1 Kgs 8:23-29, 51-53; 2 Kgs 13:23) (Knoppers & McConville, 2000).

**From Joshua to King Saul.** Many scholars agree that the book of Joshua is directly related to the Pentateuch, especially to Deuteronomy, because it shows the

fulfillment of the hope of the previous five books (VanGemeren, 1995). The story of Achan in Joshua 7 gives insight on the subject of divine forgiveness. According to Joshua 7:1, when Achan stole the items devoted to God, God's anger burned against all of Israel (Krašovec, 1999). God responds by saying,

Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. And they have even taken some of the things under the ban and have both stolen and deceived. Moreover, they have also put them among their own things. (Josh 7:11)

This passage shows that sin is regarded as communal. Because of Achan's sin, all of Israel suffered and his whole family was put to death. Although Achan confessed his sin and returned what he stole (7:20-23), he could not receive forgiveness from God, because at this time repentance did not necessarily bring about forgiveness. While God undoubtedly valued repentance and confession as prerequisites for forgiveness and reconciliation, the decision to extend forgiveness belongs to God himself as the ultimate offended party. It is also possible that Israel's communal responsibility for sin may have prompted later concern for one another's sin within the covenantal community (see Josh 22:16-20).

In Joshua's last sermon, he re-emphasizes the deuteronomic commandment (Deut 30:6) that the Israelites should love God with all of their heart (Josh 23: 11) as evidenced by their exclusive worship of Yahweh. Joshua warns strongly about the dangers of idolatry (Josh 24:19). However, the book of Judges shows that the concern about apostasy becomes a reality soon after Joshua's death, during the period of the judges (Judg 2:7-12). Following Joshua's death, Israel did not have direct guidance from God, and they began to intermarry with the Canaanite people and worship foreign gods (Judg 2:19; 8:33). The book of Judges shows a pattern in which Israel commits idolatry, God's wrath is expressed, the people suffer under God's punishment, Israel cries out or repents, and God saves or offers forgiveness. House (1998) states that this pattern between God and Israel because of idolatry underlines the importance of Israel's vertical



relationship with God:

In Judges, no issue matters more than Israel's commitment to covenantal monotheism. Any deviation from this principle results in disaster for the nation. Every time the author states that Israel displeases God, it is idolatry that causes the relational disjuncture. Other sorts of sins can be forgiven as individuals turn to the God who forgives, but those who worship idols cut themselves off from theological reality and a relationship with the living God. (p. 215)

Also, "the cycles in Judges reveal God's constant discipline of Israel for their sin, often allowing their enemies to subjugate them" (Boda, 2009, p. 187). In other words, God's punishment of Israel in Judges was for the purpose of repentance and discipline. In this, Israel's cry for help is a sign of repentance, seeking forgiveness. Although there is disagreement about whether Israel's groaning is motivated by genuine repentance or is simply a response to the pain of oppression, it becomes an appeal for Yahweh's compassion resulting in the reversal of God's judgment (Hoyt, 2012; Knoppers & McConville, 2000). Israel's repeated sinning after their repentance might raise questions about the genuineness of that repentance. Throughout the book of Judges, Israel's repentance seems to be just very shallow—more of a cry for salvation from sufferings, than a deep sense of sin leading to a deep revulsion towards the sin. However, the shallowness of the Israelites' repentance may be rendered more understandable in light of the fact that there appears to have been no ongoing communication of the knowledge of God and his ways during this time (17:6; 21:25) as compared to the previous age in which Moses who led the Israelites from a deep communion with God and in which they had the written law. Notable is that even the judges erred like the rest of Israel. Judges 10:6-16 might be evidence that Israel's cries in fact did include confession and repentance of sin. In the passage, the Israelites cry out to the LORD, and they confess their sin very clearly: "We have sinned against You, for indeed, we have forsaken our God and served the Baals" (v. 10). At first, God refuses to forgive Israel in spite of its confession (v. 13), but after the people respond by removing idols, God becomes compassionate toward Israel in its suffering (vv. 15-16). Thus, it seems repentance in this

era, though shallow, was still an important condition of divine forgiveness (Judg 10:6-16; 1 Sam 12:10). Even so, the narratives of Judges are clear evidence that it is God's compassionate and gracious covenantal faithfulness that brings salvation to Israel rather than the repentance itself (2: 1, 17-18; 10 :16). VanGemeren (1995) states that the period of the judges is marked by God's repetitive discipline and forgiveness toward Israel, rather than his choice to destroy them, which is "Yahweh's undeserved favor to Israel" (p. 182).

In spite of God's grace, the epilogue of Judges depicts Israel's religious and moral depravity as the result of their intermingling with Canaanite culture through the stories of two Levites: Micah's young priest (Judg 17-18) and the concubine who was raped (Judg 19). The author of Judges ends the book by mentioning the issue of kingship in the last line of the book (21:25), a theme that is picked up in the book of Samuel. For Samuel, who served as a mediator between Israel and God, the issue of Israel's genuine repentance was crucial, so that a religious revival occurred in Israel based on repentance as a result of his ministry. In Mizpah, Samuel encouraged Israel to repent genuinely from the heart:

If you return to the LORD with all your heart, remove the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and direct your hearts to the LORD and serve Him alone; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines. (1 Sam 7:3)

This whole hearted repentance originated from the "deuteronomic theology of repentance" from Moses' time, which also emphasized the importance of human awareness of sin and a right attitude towards God (Deut 6:5-6; 10:16; 30:6) (Boda, 2009, p. 150). For Samuel, God's salvation through forgiveness follows total repentance (1 Sam 7:3; 12:10, 20, 24). Saul's sin of failing to carry out the ban in 1 Samuel 15 demonstrates this point. In this passage, the concept of sin is expanded "beyond exclusive worship of Yahweh at the central shrine to include meticulous obedience to all of Yahweh's commands" (Boda, 2009, p. 156). Both Samuel (1 Sam 15:11) and Saul (15:24) eagerly plead with God for forgiveness. According to Saul, he had acted in fear of the people

rather than fear of God, which is the basis of keeping God's law (Lev 19:14; 25:17; Deut 6:13, 24; 10:12, 20) (Bergen, 1996). King Saul asked Samuel to forgive (אָפּוּן) his sin, right after he announced the punishment, but Samuel rejected the request. "Saul's attempt to throw the blame on the people is a clear indication that he has not made a full and honest confession" (Krašovec, 1999, p. 342). In spite of Samuel's intercessory prayer for Saul's forgiveness (v. 11), God does not change his mind (v. 29) or forgive Saul and is very grieved because of Saul (v. 11). Thus, this story shows that the role of a mediator was less important in this era than in Moses's time and the genuineness and depth of the sinner's repentance had become more central. Here, Saul grasped the hem of Samuel's robe in his final supplication, resulting in the tearing of the robe, which served as "a sign that confirmed Saul's punishment" (Klein, 2008, p. 153). This means that there is no way of atonement for the forgiveness of Saul's sin, because Saul had shown that "he was spiritually incorrigible, in spite of previous warnings and penalties" (Bergen, 1996, p. 174). Thus, the story of Saul's sin shows again that biblical forgiveness lays ultimately in the hands of the offended party.

**The Davidic/monarchical period.** David stands in contrast to Saul, because he was chosen by God, rather than by the people (1 Sam 12:13), he was a man after God's own heart (1 Sam 16:12; Acts 13:22), and he received an unconditional promise that his kingship would last forever (2 Sam 7) (Klein, 1979). Furthermore, the Bible records how David administered justice and righteousness for all the people before God by obeying God in spite of his sin of adultery and murder (2 Sam 8:15; 1 Kgs 3:6; 15:5).

David's treatment of Saul's sin of slaying the Gibeonites, who were a socially weak minority living among the Israelites (Josh 9:23), shows some aspects of atonement (2 Sam 21:3). Saul's actions constituted a national sin, because it was a violation of a national covenant with them (Josh 9), and so it resulted in punishment in the form of a famine (Smith, 1995). David asked the Gibeonites how he could atone or pay ransom for

(כִּפָּר) the sin: “What should I do for you? And how can I make atonement that you may bless the inheritance of the Lord?” (2 Sam 21: 3). However, the Gibeonites stated that a financial ransom would not suffice, and instead demanded the blood of people. According to Moses’ law in Numbers 35:30-34, the Gibeonites were right, because murder pollutes the land and the sin cannot be atoned for by anything, except by the blood of the murderer (v. 33). Thus, in this case, the execution of seven of Saul’s descendants, the murderer, became both atonement—cleansing the sin from the land—and punishment of the sinner. After the Gibeonites had executed them, God listened to Israel’s prayer (v. 14). Because of Saul’s sin, the Gibeonites could not bless Israel (v. 3), but as soon as the sin was atoned for, God listened to Israel’s prayer (v. 14). God does not bless or listen to the offender until those who have been offended forgive them. In other words, God is on the side of human victims and acknowledges their desire to achieve justice and makes the offender take responsibility for his or her sin.

Second Samuel 12 tells how God forgave David’s murder and adultery, for which he deserved capital punishment, when he confessed his sin (2 Sam 12:5, 13; cf. Num 35:30-34) (John, 1969). David knew very well that his sin against Uriah and Bathsheba was a sin against God (2 Sam 12:13; Ps 51:4). However, God’s forgiveness of David was a mitigation of the original punishment of death, because it did not exclude the punishment of his family (Boda, 2009; John, 1969). Perhaps another significant experience of repentance for David was the account in 2 Samuel 24 in which God forgave David’s disobedience of conducting a census and gave him a chance to choose “a milder punishment” (John, 1969, p. 209). Unlike Saul, who did not admit his sin honestly and promptly, but shifted responsibility to others (1 Sam 15:24) even after a long confrontation, David acknowledged his sin quickly and humbly right after Nathan’s confrontation (2 Sam 12:13-25). Furthermore, he was willing to bear the full responsibility of his sin whatever the consequences:

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against You, You

only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak and blameless when You judge. (Ps 51:3-4)

Thus, it seems that although repentance was not a primary cause of God's forgiveness in these cases, a sinner's repentance might affect God's forgiveness through mitigation or postponement of punishment. For example, a century later, when Ahab was deeply affected by Elijah's prophesy about God's coming punishment and showed signs of repentance such as humbling himself and fasting (1 Kgs 21:27-29), "God forgives him and postpones the judgment on his family, which demonstrates the Lord's overwhelming grace and mercy" (House, 1995, p. 233). Afterwards, through the punishment of his newborn son's illness, king David came to a point of profound repentance. The death of the child implies that human guilt can be transferred to another (Krašovec, 1999). Jacobs (2013) states that David seemed to atone for his sin against Uriah in part by identifying himself with Uriah, through the same behaviors which Uriah did, such as lying on the ground, fasting, and refraining from washing or sexual relations with the wife (2 Sam 11:9-11). "David's opportunity for atonement comes when it is the life of someone important to him—the son of Bathsheb—that is at stake" (Jacobs, 2013, p. 576). Thus, a primary purpose of God's punishment or atonement is to deepen the sinner's repentance. Through repentance, David reached reconciliation with God and his misery seems to end (2 Sam 12:25). However, this serious sin totally changed David's life, because he and his family bore the burden of his sin for the rest of their lives (2 Sam 12:11). This means that in that era human communities such as families or nations should bear corporate responsibility for sin. Krašovec (1999) states,

In the context of the beliefs of the Hebrew people, the conclusion that repentance could produce a reprieve for David, but could not undo the sin is justified. Sin must be atoned for in some way, often it is wholly or partly borne by the sinner, sometimes the consequences are borne by another or atoned for by the vicarious suffering of the righteous. (p. 343)

God's forgiveness in Solomon's age is particularly evident in Solomon's temple dedication prayer (1 Kgs 8:23-53). A primary purpose of Solomon's prayer was to secure divine forgiveness (1 Kgs 8:30), as indicated by the frequent use of the verb סלח

(“forgive”) throughout his prayer. The ideas of return (שוב) as well as repentance to God with one’s whole soul and heart (v. 48) are also used throughout the prayer and appear to be related to God’s forgiveness. The temple is also described primarily as a house of prayer for the forgiveness of sin, not as a place of sacrifice (Balentine, 1993; Smith, 1995). Thus, Solomon prays,

When Your people Israel are defeated before an enemy, because they have sinned against You, if they turn to You again and confess Your name and pray and make supplication to You in this house, then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of Your people Israel, and bring them back to the land which You gave to their fathers. (1 Kgs 8:33-34)

In this prayer, Solomon seems to believe that genuine repentance and verbal confession of sin through prayer should precede forgiveness of sin (v. 47) and that after being forgiven, sinners need to learn the good way of life from God (v. 36). In other words, the experience of repenting and receiving forgiveness can transform a person (Boda, 2009, p. 183). However, repentance itself is only possible on the grounds of God’s “unconditional promise to David (8:22-26) and “the promise given to Moses (8:51-53)” (Boda & Smith, 2006, p. 32). The history of Judah (the Southern Kingdom) shows that God forgave his people on the basis of his covenant with David. “At times, Yahweh acts mercifully or delays or mitigates punishment for the sake of faithful David (1 Kgs 3:6; 8:25-26; 9:5; 11:12-13, 32, 34, 36; 15:45; 2 Kgs 8:19, 19:34, 20:6)” (Boda, 2009, p. 178).

After Solomon’s reign, the sin of idolatry became a much more serious issue in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Apostasy in Israel began very early from the era of its first king, Jeroboam, who set up two golden calves at Bethel and Dan (1 Kgs 12:28-30). As a result, Jeroboam became the paradigm of an evil king (1 Kgs 15:26, 34; 16:19) and his descendants had to bear the punishment of his sin (1 Kgs 15:29-30; cf. Exod 34:7; 20:5; Deut 5:9; Num 14:18). All of the kings of the Northern Kingdom are described negatively. However, eight of the southern kings are evaluated positively in the book of Kings. The standard of evaluation for kings was whether or not they kept the way of David, who had walked with God. In this era, prophets such as Elijah and Elisha began to

take a role in dealing with the sin of idolatry in both kingdoms. The patterns of sin and obedience of the ancestors were shown to affect later generations, and so David and Jeroboam were regarded as a model of good or evil, respectively (Boda, 2009). Thus, during this age the intergenerational effects of sin (1 Kgs 15:3; 2 Kgs 23:25-27) were underscored. However, in spite of consistent calls to repent of the sin of idolatry, the Northern Kingdom would not listen to God's word and was punished by being sent into exile (1 Kgs 17:7-18).

Judah's situation was not much different. Manasseh ruled at the peak of Judah's apostasy, because he did many evil things that God had forbidden and so provoked God to anger (2 Kgs 21:1-18; 24:3-4). Manasseh's son followed in his evil ways (2 Kgs 21:20; cf. 2 Chr 33:22). Boda (2009) states that "2 Kings 21 is a key turning point in the history of Judah in the book of Kings, because it is the sin of Manasseh that mostly explains the Exile of the Kingdom of Judah" (p. 179). Because Manasseh's sin was so serious, God would not forgive (סלח) Judah, and so his sin resulted in the exile of the next generation (2 Kgs 23:25-27; 24:4). The theme of repentance is consistently highlighted in the midst of the history of apostasy in Israel and Judah. In this age, repentance had already become a necessary condition of God's forgiveness. Even so, God sometimes mercifully saved Israel from suffering on the basis of his promise, without Israel's full repentance (2 Kgs 13:3-5, 22-23; 14:26-27). However, this does not mean that God forgave Israel; he simply spared them from judgment.

To understand God's forgiveness at this time, one will have to grasp how God dealt with Israel as the offender in 2 Kings 17:7-13, which is a summary of why Northern Israel fell (House, 1995). Second Kings 17:13 reads,

Yet the LORD warned Israel and Judah through all His prophets and every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways and keep My commandments, My statutes according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you through My servants the prophets.

Here, repentance consists of both turning from evil and keeping God's word (Boda,

2009). One of the most frequently used words in the Hebrew Bible for repentance (שוב) originally meant “turn back” or “come or go back” (BDB, p. 996). In the OT, the relationship between God and Israel is often described as a journey on a road, using language such as ‘walking in the way of the Lord’ or ‘turning aside to the right or to the left,’ and so, שׁוּב refers to turning back to covenant relationship with God (*ABD*, vol. 5; Ferguson, 2000). Thus, repentance is more of an action than a feeling and encompasses the act of turning from evil and turning to God (*NIDB*, vol. 4). To return to God, the offender needs to recognize and admit his or her offense to God honestly and humbly. Thus, repentance is “a God-centered response, indeed the beginning of true God-centeredness” (Ferguson, 2000, p. 13).

During the monarchical age, perfect models of repentance were David (Ps 51) and Josiah (2 Kgs 22: 19), because they recognized their sins against God, humbled themselves and turned from disobedience to obedience. Although David committed serious sins, he sincerely repented and was later evaluated by God as the model or standard of a good king (1 Kgs 11:38; 14:8; 2 Kgs 14:3; 16:2; 18:3; 19:34; 22:2). Josiah, who reformed the kingdom according to the Law that was found in the temple, was evaluated as follows:

Before him there was no king like him who turned to the LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him. (2 Kgs 23:25)

This passage describes Josiah as “the ideal king,” because he embodies the kind of obedience God asked for from his people in Deuteronomy (6:5; 5:32; 17:11, 20; 28:14) (Segal, 2012, p. 84). Ahab, on the other hand, received God’s forgiveness in the form of mitigated punishment by postponing the judgment of his sin to his next generation (1 Kgs 21:27-29) (House, 1995). However, even though he repented, he never returned to God’s ways nor restored his relationship with God. Boda (2009) points out that “the text emphasizes Ahab’s acts of humility but says nothing about a change in behavior” (p. 183).



Thus, it appears that there are different stages of repentance, just as there are different stages of forgiveness. According to the author of the book of Kings, the nation of Israel failed in genuine repentance, because it would neither listen to or obey God's word (2 Kgs 17:14-15; 18:12). Ironically, in this era in which God's people committed apostasy and failed to repent, a Gentile, Naaman, is highlighted for pursuing both negative repentance—that is a return from the sin of idolatry—and positive repentance—that is, turning to the Lord as the one true God. After he turned from his idolatry, he sought to walk with God by asking for God's forgiveness of his idolatry (Luke 4:23-30):

But may the LORD forgive (חָלַט) your servant for this one thing: When my master enters the temple of Rimmon to bow down and he is leaning on my arm and I bow there also--when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the LORD forgive (חָלַט) your servant for this. (2 Kgs 5:18)

House (1995) states that “sadly, Naaman’s confession of faith condemns most Israelites of that era, since they have rejected the one true God and embraced gods that cannot heal” (p. 273).

The most serious sin in the monarchical era was idolatry and the need for repentance was highlighted by the fact that sin always led to punishment or suffering and God's forgiveness often appeared as mitigated punishment (1 Kgs 8:46-51; 11: 38-39) (Boda, 2009). The punishment of God's people in the OT is a form of discipline, prompting repentance. However, the call to repentance is always based on God's merciful and gracious character and his promises to Israel (1 Sam 12:22; 1 Kgs 8:23-29, 51-53; 2 Kgs 13:23). Fretheim states that “human repentance constitutes a gift of God in view of the promise; indeed, repentance is not possible without the promise being understood as directly applicable to the one who would repent” (Boda & Smith, 2006, p. 33). Having just examined sin and forgiveness in the monarchical era, we see that this time in Israel's history was characterized by apostasy and covenantal violation and so, in response, many prophets took up the role of delivering God's word (Boda & Smith, 2006).

**The prophets in the monarchical period.** The historical and the prophetic writings of the monarchical era describe the same time frame. Generally, the (latter) Prophets are categorized as the books that began from the period of the divided monarchy and continued into the postexilic period. Thus, most prophets were contemporaries of the people in the books of Kings (Bandstra, 2008). However, the historical writings, also called the Former Prophets, take a different perspective compared to the prophetic writings. These books, such as 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles emphasize the perfect standards of God's kingdom and the reason for Israel's destruction. Bandstra (2008) states that these writings focus on the history of Israel as the nation of God, while the prophetic writings focus more on the personal and social life of God's people:

The answer to the question "What is prophecy?" must be sought in the literature and culture of ancient Israel. Predicting the future was not the primary component of the prophetic task in the Israelite world. The basic function of biblical prophecy was to analyze political policies and social conditions in light of YHWH's demands of justice, loyalty, and faith in him. The prophet was most concerned that these moral and religious principles govern the corporate and personal lives of God's people. The closest analogies in our modern world to the biblical prophets of old might be leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mohandas Gandhi, who each had a keen sense of the divine requirements for social justice, freedom, and human dignity. (p. 195)

Furthermore, the latter prophets were active in the latter part of these monarchical period; even though, for example, Hosea and Isaiah were regarded as early prophets of the monarchical era, they are seen together with the later Judean kings of such as Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Thus, these different emphases shed a different light on and help understand God's forgiveness in the OT in another way. Therefore, we can conclude that forgiveness of the prophetic era can be regarded as forgiveness of the latter monarchical period.

God's central message through various prophets, during the latter part of the monarchical era, was an ongoing call to repentance, even as the prophets asked God to forgive Israel (Boda & Smith, 2006; Redlich, 1937). The prophetic books give insight

into the breadth and depth of sins taking place in Israel during this time. Dempsey (as cited in Boda & Smith, 2006) states,

The two kingdoms are guilty of excessive land appropriation (Isa 5:8), the perversion of justice (Isa 5:20), self-centeredness (Isa 58:3a), oppression of laborers (Isa 58:3b), infidelity and disloyalty (Hos 4:1), swearing, lying, murder, stealing, adultery (Hos 4:2), false prophecy (Mic 3:9-11), political and religious depravity and arrogance (Mic 3:9-11), social injustices of every sort (Amos 8:4-6), idolatry (Mic 1:7; Ezek 6:4, etc.), apostasy (Jer 2:19), among other transgressions. (p. 49)

This list of sins in the prophetic writings shows that the prophets were deeply concerned not only about vertical sin against God, but also about horizontal sins against other human beings. One important development at this time is that the prophets began to deal with the religious life and interpersonal responsibility of individual Israelites (Redlich, 1937). They focused on the inwardness of human beings as the center of genuine religion, rather than on outward religious activity, such as rituals. Thus, the prophets diagnosed the cause of Israel's repetitive failure to keep God's law as a moral issue stemming from a heart that was hardened, false, proud, rebellious, and idolatrous (Hos 10:2; 13:6; Jer 5:23; 17:9; 31:33; 49:16; Ezek 28:7; 14:4; Obad 1:3).

Once Solomon's temple had been completed and filled with God's glory (2 Chr 7:1-4), Israelites in the monarchical era seemed to mistakenly believe that ritual obedience in the temple would win divine forgiveness. The prophets spoke against this idea and emphasized the condition of the heart and knowledge of God (Isa 1:10-17; Jer 7:1-26; Hos 4:1-6; Jer 31:34) (Burnside, 2011). While prophets, like their predecessors, believed in conditional forgiveness through repentance and confession of sin, they also stressed that sin could only be covered by God himself (Mic 6:6-8; 7:18; Amos 7:1-8:3; Hos 14:1-2; Isa 43:25; 46:12; 55:7; Jer 3:12; 31:31-34; 36:3; Lam 3:40-41; Ezek 3: 17-20; 36:26-31) (Konstan, 2010; Boda & Smith, 2006; Redlich, 1937). Isaiah warns that sacrifices are worthless unless they are accompanied by repentant hearts and obedience within human relationships (Isa 1:10-17). Isaiah 43:25 reads: "I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins".

Jeremiah condemns the belief that as long as the temple was in Jerusalem and the people were faithful to perform sacrifices, God would protect Israel (Jer 7:1-26). As a result, in the prophetic age, the concept of repentance is significantly developed from a mere display of outward behavioral change to internal transformation that manifests itself in visible behavioral change. According to the prophets, God “demands a penitential response among the people that involves affection, word, and deed” (Boda, 2009, p. 252).

Compared to the Torah of Moses’ era and the historical writings of the monarchical age, in which there is an almost exclusive emphasis on divine justice or punishment of Israel’s apostasy, the prophetic writings tend to proclaim God’s unfailing covenant love more explicitly (Jer 31:3; Isa 44:21-22; 49:14-15) in addition to emphasizing God’s punishment (Redlich, 1937; O’Kennedy, 2011). Along with strong warnings about punishment for unrepentance, which often becomes, in fact, “motivation for repentance” (Ezek 18:21-24; 33:11-15; Hos 5:1-7:16), there is also prophetic encouragement that God will never abandon Israel even when they abandon him (Isa 51:11; 52:7-10; 54:8; Jer 31:38-40; Hos 11:7-9) (Boda, 2009, p. 230).

My people are bent on turning from me. Though they call them to the One on high, none at all exalts Him. How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I surrender you, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart is turned over within Me, All My compassions are kindled. (Hos 11:7-8)

For Isaiah God’s wrath toward sinful Israel is a transient emotion, but his kindness is everlasting (Isa 54:8). God will never fail to forgive repentant people (Ezek 18:21-23). Even foreign nations were encouraged to lament and repent to avoid God’s judgment (Jer 49:1-6; Jonah 1:2). There is forgiveness for all who repent and turn from evil (Jonah 3). Jonah was angry when God graciously forgave Nineveh in response to their repentance (Jonah 4:1), because he did not want Israel’s national enemy to repent and receive God’s forgiveness. Unlike Moses, who described God as a God who both punishes and forgives (Exod 34:6-7), Jonah focuses only on God’s forgiveness: “I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who

relents concerning calamity” (4:2). This statement is not an exaggeration—here, God’s forgiveness of the Ninevites is not a mitigation of the original punishment, but a total cancellation of all punishment. God’s forgiveness is only given to the repentant, “but is not necessarily contingent upon their repentance, for indeed, God’s fidelity to their covenant relationship is completely steadfast, and God’s sustaining compassion is a gift free of human initiative or endeavors” (Boda & Smith, 2006, p. 61).

Furthermore, the prophets’ teachings that an individual’s heart condition and social justice are critical to true religion is the foundation for the next stage of development of human forgiveness. In fact, interpersonal forgiveness was not considered a virtue at this time, and it was not required among the people of Israel (Redlich, 1937; Barton & Reimer, 1996). Instead, the OT writers focused on the joy of receiving God’s forgiveness (Pss 32; 103; 130; 51; Job 33:28), which was limited to Israel at that time (Wright, 1997). The Pentateuch did not mention human forgiveness; rather, it was in the age of the prophets that notions of human forgiveness began to emerge. Unlike their predecessors, who focused exclusively on Israel’s vertical relationship with God, the prophets showed a strong interest in the moral responsibility of individuals in human relationships. In the prophets, God’s forgiveness is promised based on a sinner’s righteous life in relation to both God and other people, not so much on religious ritual itself (Hos 6:1-6; Isa 1:11-18; 55:7; Amos 5:3-24; Mal 2:10). For example, Malachi exclaims (2:10): “Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant of our fathers?” Jeremiah 5:1-9 states that although God was willing to forgive, he could not, because the people were living in serious sin, such as idolatry, adultery, and social injustice. In this way, one’s righteousness in human relationship paralleled one’s religious life. In the prophetic writings, there is also a promise of divine forgiveness for the genuinely repentant and judgment for the unrepentant (Isa 55:6-7; 59:20; Ezek 33:10-20; Jer 5:1, 6; 29:12-14; 30:11-15, 36:3, 30-31; Amos 5:4-6; Hos 14:1-9). The prophets

proclaim that Israel will be forgiven in the future, after they endure a period of divine judgement. Thus, God's forgiveness does not exclude just punishment according to the prophets (O'Kennedy, 2011). In the whole OT, including the prophetic writings, sinners are always held responsible for their guilt. Israel's exile was also, in fact, a mitigation of original punishment because of God's special mercy toward his people (Isa 27:7-9; Hos 11:8).

In some cases, God's forgiveness appears as withholding or postponing judgment temporally. For example, as a result of Amos' mediation in asking God to forgive Israel, God relented and withheld the punishment (Amos 7:3, 6). John (1969) describes divine forgiveness in Amos as follows:

Forgiveness then, in Amos, is a happening that comes between God's determination to punish and the carrying out of the punishment, so that God withholds the judgment which should otherwise have fallen on the people. God's forgiveness may temporarily withhold punishment, but it does not establish a new stage in which God sets a new relationship between him and the people. Forgiveness is not a restoration of broken fellowship, as forgiveness is often understood, but a withholding of the punishment, so that people may be spared from the judgment. (pp. 212-13)

At the same time, the punishment in the form of the exile was also a chance to discipline and transform Israel through repentance (Jer 31:18-22; 24:7; 32:38) (Brueggemann, 1998). The prophets describe God as the offended party who experiences emotional pain, because of the impudent offender who does not repent (Jer 5:7; Isa 1:11-16). God wants to forgive, but cannot without repentance, so he must punish his people (Jer 5:1, 7). However, God promises that he will forgive them under a new covenant in the future in which "divine forgiveness is an integral part of the relationship between God and his new covenant community" (O'Kennedy, 2011, p. 739). Divine forgiveness under the new covenant is truly epochal, because of the transformation of the people's relationship to the law from an external law to one written on the heart and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (Jer 31:33; Ezek 11:19-20; 36:25-26).

Divine forgiveness in Jeremiah 30-33, the so-called "Book of Consolation," is

described with various expressions, such as ‘to cleanse,’ ‘to forgive,’ and ‘not to remember sin, guilt, or rebellion,’ revealing that this “divine forgiveness overpowers all the dimensions of sin” (O’Kennedy, 2011, p. 738). The prophets, who had longed for God to forgive Israel, seemed to recognize that genuine repentance of the heart is impossible without God’s grace, because they knew that the heart of God’s people had been ingrained with sin (Jer 17:1; Isa 46:12). Another significant revelation about divine forgiveness in the prophetic writings is that a perfect atonement in the future would result in full and permanent forgiveness through the suffering of one man described in Isaiah 53 (see also Dan 9:24). Groves (as cited in Hill & James III, 2004) points out that the unique concept of atonement through the suffering servant of God is totally new to the Mosaic tradition:

Moses offered to have his name blotted out of the book of life to atone for Israel and to spare them further wrath. Yahweh’s answer was clear: the one who sinned will die, not you. . . . This certainly seems to state clearly that one human cannot die to make atonement for another. (p. 80)

The promise, then, of atonement through the righteous servant of God (Isa 52:13-53:12) is a radical revelation about Jesus’ atoning ministry in the coming era.

Further, the prophetic writings show that prophets in the late monarchical period had a more advanced concept of sin based on individual responsibility. This development of personal responsibility regarding sinful or virtuous behaviors is significant with regard to the prophets’ contexts; some blamed the previous generation for their sufferings, such as invasions by other nations (Jer 31:27-30; Ezek 18:1-4, cf. Lam 5:7). Rather than the communal concept of sin, which had been dominant in Pentateuchal and historical writings (see: Lev 26:39-40; Num 32:14; 1 Kgs 11:12; 21:29; 2 Kgs 24:3; 2 Chr 30:7) and could be summarized with the phrase “the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge” (Jer 31:29), a new understanding of personal agency began to evolve. Even though the personal concept of sin had existed to some extent in limited form Moses’ days (Deut 24:16), the idea of communal sin was

dominant until the prophetic writings. This new perspective introduced a reality in which each man could break with his past and have a new repentant heart. This personal concept of sin and forgiveness continued to deepen in the post-exilic period and, at last, became the foundation of the concept of sin and forgiveness in the NT.

In conclusion, revelation of divine forgiveness undergoes a significant development in the prophetic writings with the emerging emphasis on genuine transformation of the heart, a more advanced personal concept of sin, and the revelation of full and permanent forgiveness through perfect atonement of a righteous man in the future.

### **The Post-Exilic Period**

After the destruction of the Northern Kingdom, the Southern Kingdom persisted for about 135 years until 586 BC when the city and the temple of Jerusalem in Judah were destroyed by Babylon. Divine forgiveness continued to develop in this period with a more explicit emphasis on mercy, righteousness, and God's sovereignty. Also, in addition to the sacrificial rituals, various means of securing divine forgiveness through righteous works were introduced, such as prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and a martyr's death (Redlich, 1937; Quarles, 2005). Before the exile, Israel's religion was characterized mainly by the sacrificial system of the Jerusalem temple. However, the destruction of the city and the temple meant that Israel's religion had to be transformed and interpreted in a new way (Dechow, 2007; Scott, 1995). The Diaspora meant that Israel could no longer maintain its identity through cultic rituals in the temple, and, thus, religion came to be understood as something between God and each individual, thereby emphasizing each person's pious experience (Neusner, 1988). Consequently, because of the cessation of temple rituals, a new way of securing divine forgiveness had to be established; "many Diaspora Jews tended to spiritualize the means of atonement and substituted various acts of righteousness for the atoning rituals" (Quarles, 2005, p. 43). For example, in the



apocryphal book of Tobit, righteous and pious acts, especially almsgiving, are put forward as means of securing divine forgiveness: “Prayer with fasting and alms with uprightness are better than riches with iniquity. Better to practice almsgiving than to hoard up gold. Almsgiving saves from death and purges every kind of sin. Those who give alms have their fill of days” (Tobit 12:8-9). Thus, the ways of securing divine forgiveness became more personal and various in this era.

However, there was still the communal concept of sin and forgiveness. The righteous works of some people were believed to be a means of divine forgiveness for the whole community; 2 Baruch 14:7 reads, “And if there are others who did evil, Zion should have been forgiven on account of the works of those who did morally right works and should not have been overwhelmed because of the works of those who acted unrighteously.” Also, the prophets’ emphasis on righteous or moral living in relationship with others, rather than on rituals tied to their vertical relationship with God, was strengthened in postexilic writings, such as Sirach and the Qumran documents (Quarles, 2005). In Sirach, “to make atonement, that is, to restore the relationship with God broken by sin, lies in decisive renunciation of wrongdoing rather than in liturgical act” (Snaith, 1974, p. 171). As a result, it was not unusual that the Jews of Jesus’ time were obsessed with their righteous acts (Matt 23:25; Luke 11:39-42).

Even among the various righteous works mentioned, personal repentance was emphasized as the main condition of divine forgiveness in this era. At the time of the exile, God’s people sought to understand why the holy land had been demolished by other nations in spite of God’s promise (Gen 12:1; 13:15; 2 Sam 7:12-16) and came to recognize that it had happened as a consequence of the previous generation’s idolatry and their failure to repent. Thus, Jewish writings from this era show an ongoing dominant concern about the communal sin of ancestors (Lev 26:39-40; Num 32:14; 1 Kgs 11:12; 21:29; 2 Kgs 24:3; 2 Chr 30:7); but, at the same time, the concepts of personal responsibility and repentance of sin—the issues which began to be raised by the prophets

in the late monarchical period (Jer 31:27-30; Ezek 18:1-4, cf. Lam 5:7)—were developed much more. For example, a prayer in the book of Tobit reads: “Remember me, and look on me, punish me not for my sins and ignorances, and the sins of my fathers, who have sinned before thee” (3:3). Because the exile resulted from their forefathers’ sin, securing God’s forgiveness through genuine repentance meant the end of exile and restoration of God’s people to the land of promise. In this vein, postexilic literature, such as Daniel, Chronicles, Nehemiah, Ezra, the Pseudepigrapha, the Apocrypha, Josephus, and Philo feature frequent confession of sins (Boda & Smith, 2006; Lee, Hughes, & Viljoen, 2012). For example, in the Psalms of Solomon, personal repentance is described “as means of receiving God’s forgiveness” (Lee et al., 2012, p. 6).

He cleanseth from sins a soul when it maketh confession, when it maketh acknowledgement; For shame is upon us and upon our faces on account of all these things. And to whom doth He forgive sins, except to them that have sinned. Thou blessest the righteous, and dost not reprove them for the sins that they have committed; And Thy goodness is upon them that sin, when they repent. (Psalms of Solomon 9:12-15)

In the context of exile, the people’s faith in Yahweh was strengthened as covenantal faithfulness to the law differentiated them from the Gentiles, and so the sin of idolatry, a major sin in Israel’s pre-exile history was removed from Israel (Dechow, 2007; Neusner, 1988). In other words, the punishment of “exile cured Israel of its ancient idolatry” (LaSor et al., 1996, p. 284). God’s forgiveness was considered to be limited to the Jewish community, because the Diaspora strengthened their identity as God’s covenantal people, set apart from the Gentiles. Thus, it is not strange that in Ezra 9 the issue of mixed marriage with Gentiles was treated with great seriousness, because the Jews understood that their exile was the result of the same kind of sin (Ezra 9:12). 4 Maccabees shows divine forgiveness through the vicarious atonement of a martyr’s death, but the effect of the atoning death was limited to God’s people (Lee, Hughes & Viljoen, 2012).

## **God's Anger and Divine Forgiveness in the OT**

The OT consistently demonstrates that God's anger is his primary response to human sin, which compromises justice; in turn, God's anger and discipline often lead sinners to repentance (Poetker, 1987; Hower, 1974). Thus, God's wrath is considered a transitory attribute and his justice can be called "corrective wrath" (Poetker, 1987, p. 61). For example, because of God's anger, Moses (Exod 4:14), sinful Israel (Num 11:1; Exod 32:10), and the people of Nineveh (Jonah 3:9) repent and obey God. Because God is holy, his anger is righteous, containing no hint of sin, evil, or loss of control (Best, 1985). As Schlimm (2011) points out, Genesis "contains no explicit, actualized references to divine anger" (p. 12). However, since the time of Moses, God has been described as angry regarding the sins of his people. God's anger is cited often in the Pentateuch. This is because in the desert, Israel needed to be disciplined, because of the pagan religion and cultural habits that had shaped them during their time in Egypt. Once the written law was introduced, they had more responsibility than the previous generation (North, 1990; VanGemenen, 1996). Nevertheless, God's wrath toward his people is always a transient emotion, while his mercy is everlasting (Isa 54:8; Ps 78:38-39). As a result, "forgiveness and mercy rather than anger and punishment were to be preferred as manifested in the history of Israel" (Redlich, 1937, p. 18).

In this respect, anger over a perceived violation of justice is a natural emotion for human beings as God's image bearers (Schlimm, 2011; Elliott, 2006). Fretheim (2002) explains that anger is a sign of being a relational being:

For God or humans, anger is always relational, exercised with respect to others. Even more, as with human anger, the divine anger is a sign that the relationship is taken seriously (apathy is not productive of anger). God is deeply engaged in this relationship and is passionate about what happens to it. As such, anger is always provoked from within such relationship, testifying to the affectivity of both human beings and God. (p. 7)

Despite the similarities between human and divine anger, the human standard of justice is not the same as God's (Isa 55:8). An individual's standard of justice can be

easily distorted because of sinful self-love. For example, Cain murdered Abel out of selfish anger, rather than righteous anger (Gen 4:5-7). As a result, human anger can easily become sinful and can even result in violence, destruction, or murder. Thus, human anger might be defined “as a response to the threat to selfhood: to the physical self, the social self, and self-esteem” (Saussy, 1995, p. 15). In this respect, the OT portrays human anger negatively and warns of the need to control this destructive emotion (Prov 14:29, 16:32, 22:24, 29:11; Eccl 7:9; Pss 4:4, 37:8-9). The same is true of the NT as well (Eph 4:26-3; Jas 1:19-20; Col 3:8). In fact, psychological theories indicate that human perception and emotion can be distorted by an individual’s past experience through defense mechanisms or transference etc. (Norcross, Vandenbos, & Freedheim, 2010; Gurman & Messer, 2013). In summary, human anger can be good and just when it is used according to the standard of divine justice (Saussy, 1995; Hower, 1974). The OT shows that divine anger and punishment of human sin promotes sinners to repent and reconcile with God. In the same way, when human anger conforms to God’s standard, it can bring about some good fruits, such as repentance and reconciliation. In this respect, God’s people should ask whether their anger is righteous or not, just as God asked Cain (Gen 4:4) and Jonah (Jonah 4:9). Anger can be expressed in love through thoughtful and honest confrontation with the aim of helping a person grow in godliness (Eph 4:15).

### **Human Forgiveness in the OT**

Throughout the OT, God taught his people that every sin is ultimately an offense against God and that forgiveness belongs to God (Owen, 1966b; Shults & Sandage, 2003). This teaching was ingrained in the Jewish people of Jesus’ age (Mark 2:7). Furthermore, contrary to the modern focus on human forgiveness, the OT almost exclusively focuses on divine forgiveness (Griswold & Konstan, 2012; Rezetko et al., 2006; Konstan, 2010; Gowan, 2010). In fact, in the OT, “the interpersonal dimension is either ignored or further exacerbated by looking towards vengeance rather than

reconciliation” (Day, 2010, p. 81). Thus, there are only a few narratives related to human forgiveness in the OT, such as Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, and David and Abigail (Rezetko et al., 2006; Watts & Gulliford, 2004). Reimer observes that in these stories of human forgiveness, the victims, Esau, Joseph, and David, hold power over their offenders, and the offenders request forgiveness in a position of self-abasement (Rezetko et al., 2006; Barton & Reimer, 1996). This is because the offenders faced the threat of death if they could not earn the offended parties’ forgiveness. They sought to propitiate their sins by presenting restitution and by humbling themselves, sometimes referring to themselves as “servant” and their victims as “lord” (Rezetko et al., 2006). Thus, Reimer emphasizes that “here, the initiative lies squarely on the shoulders of the offending party” (Barton & Reimer, 1996, p. 273). In the OT, both divine and human forgiveness are conditional on the basis of the offender’s repentance and restitution. So, forgiveness in the OT “is always bought at a price; there is no cheap grace” (Blenkinsopp, 2008, p. 348). While these narratives definitely deal with the subject of human forgiveness, at no point does a victim explicitly say to the offender, ‘I forgive you’. This might be because of the belief at this time that forgiveness belongs to God alone (Ps 130:4). We will now turn to examining narratives on forgiveness between individuals.

### **Human Forgiveness Narratives in the OT**

The story of Jacob and Esau is the first story dealing with human forgiveness in the OT. Jacob needed forgiveness from his twin brother, Esau, who wanted to kill him, because he had stolen Esau’s birthright (Gen 27:41). Jacob sent messengers to appease Esau, but was terrified by the news that his brother had four hundred men accompanying him. Jacob’s fear and distress prompted him to pray for God’s salvation, and he prepared many gifts (מְנִחָה) for Esau, because he wanted to atone or cover (כַּפֵּר) ‘Esau’s face’ (Gen 32:20). Here, “to cover his face” indicates that the purpose of Jacob’s gifts was so that “Esau cannot see Jacob’s shame” (Mathews, 2005, p. 554). Jacob uses three terms in this

passage (Gen 32:20; 33:10), which are also used to describe sacrificial offerings for divine forgiveness. The verb כָּפַר means “to atone,” the word מִנְחָה is translated as gift and is often used to refer to the “cereal offering,” and רָצָה meaning “to accept,” is the same cultic word used to denote divine forgiveness (Wenham, 2015, p. 292).

Thus, Jacob applies the same sacrificial rituals required for divine forgiveness in his reconciliation with his brother. In other words, there is some analogy between God, as the divine offended party, and Esau, as the human offended party. This becomes clearer in the story of Jacob wrestling with God, which may seem like a strange interruption to the narrative of the twin brothers without the analogy. There are some similarities between the image of Jacob wrestling with God and his ongoing fight with Esau (Mathews, 2005; Ber, 2010). For example, a blessing was the main issue of the brothers’ broken relationship (Gen 27) and Jacob fought with God for a blessing (Gen 32:26); Jacob, when he met Esau, found the face of God that he had encountered in his wrestling in Esau’s face (Gen 33:10); and just as Jacob received God’s grace (Gen 33:5, 11), he also received grace from Esau (Gen 32:5; 33:10). Thus, God seems to serve as a substitute for the human victim, Esau (Mathews, 2005). Jacob wrestled with God face-to-face instead of fighting with Esau face-to-face, and as a result, he could “see his brother’s face” which was his goal (Ber, 2010, p. 120). In the end, Jacob’s gifts and humiliation appeased Esau. Through the encounter with God, Jacob was injured physically (Gen 32:25), but he was inwardly transformed and was given a new name (Gen 32:28), which enabled him to demonstrate true repentance and humble submission to his human victim (Mathews, 2005). Jacob’s efforts to reconcile with Esau, though resisted at first, helped him to reach a point of more genuine repentance, resulting in a new identity.

Thus, for God’s people, repentance and restitution with regard to human-to-human sins can be an opportunity for growth. Jacob presented gifts and called Esau ‘my master’ and referred to himself as ‘your servant’ and bowed down to the ground seven times. These actions reflected his desire to restore the relationship, because it brings

about a total reversal of the blessing he received from his father, Isaac (Gen 27:29). Esau forgave Jacob, because he humbled himself (Gen 32:10) and the two brothers were reconciled. This story shows that the offender should repent with humility and restitution in making amends with both the divine and human parties who have been offended. In this story, the role of the human victim is small in comparison to the offender's effort. Esau's forgiveness was very passive, since he simply received Jacob's restitution and expression of repentance. Thus, this narrative focuses more on Jacob's repentance than on Esau's forgiveness. However, Esau's response to Jacob certainly paints a beautiful picture of forgiveness: "Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him; and they wept" (Gen 33:3-4) (Griswold & Konstan, 2012). As a result, this passage indicates that true repentance before the offended human party can be difficult, scary (Gen 32:7), and even painful, but at the same time, it is an opportunity to experience transforming grace.

The second narrative featuring human forgiveness in the OT is the story of Joseph and his brothers in Genesis 37-50. Joseph had told his brothers about his dreams of superiority and in turn was betrayed by his brothers and sold as a slave to an Egyptian caravan. Ironically, Joseph's brothers ended up subjecting themselves as Joseph's slaves and asking forgiveness (אָפִיבִּיר) of sins, following their father Jacob's death (Gen 50:15-21). However, Joseph had already assured his brothers that he would not retaliate their wrongdoing, because Joseph believed that his brothers' sin against him had divine purposes (Gen 45:3-5). After Jacob's funeral, Joseph's brothers asked themselves, "what if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" (Gen 50: 15). It seems that the brothers may have exhibited sincere repentance as they bowed to Joseph and subjected themselves to the position of Joseph's slaves (Gen 50:18) (Mathews, 2005). However, it is not clear whether the brothers were truly repentant or just appeasing their victim because of fear of death (Konstan, 2010). What is clear is that without Joseph's forgiveness, they might not have survived (Rezetko et al., 2006). Joseph

replied: “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Gen 50:19-20). Here, Joseph not only comforts his brothers, but also confronts them with their sin. Joseph’s response also shows his authority over his brothers (Brueggemann, 1982; Mcconville, 2013). Mcconville explains,

When he [Joseph] asks rhetorically, “Am I in the place of God?” (50:19), he means of course that he is not. Yet in a sense he is. The command “Do not fear” is, theologically speaking, a dominical one (Deut 1:21; Rev 1:17). And the “comforting” (Gen 50:21) is reminiscent of the call of YHWH that the people should be “comforted” (Isa 40:1). (p. 647)

As a result, although Joseph is attributing the work of forgiving his brothers’ sin to God, he also seems to imply an analogy between God and himself, as the two offended parties. Furthermore, unlike Cain who denied any responsibility toward his brother, Joseph voluntarily becomes the “keeper” of his brothers ( De La Torre, 2011).

The third story is about David’s forgiveness of Abigail in the conflict caused by Nabal’s mistreatment of David and his men, who requested payment for their help in 1 Samuel 25. David reached out to Nabal in a very modest way, even referring to himself as Nabal’s son (v. 8), but Nabal responded to David in an extremely insulting manner (Klein, 2008). David became angry, because Nabal had returned evil for good (1 Sam 25:21). Thus, David decided to retaliate against Nabal and his household with a massacre. Abigail, who is described as beautiful and wise (v. 3), was informed of her husband’s brash behavior and rushed to meet David with gifts. Abigail approached David humbly, falling on her face to ask for forgiveness, confessing her iniquity, calling herself David’s handmaid, referring to David as her lord, and acknowledging David’s fight as God’s battle (v. 28) (Klein, 2008). She does this to appease David in order to avoid a massacre (Bridge, 2015; Rezetko et al., 2006). David received Abigail’s apology and blessed her and regarded her as God’s agent to prevent him from killing (vv. 33-34).

In fact, Abigail’s humble posture demonstrated by bowing, taking the lowly role of a servant, asking for forgiveness and offering gifts, parallels the manner in which



Jacob approached Esau (Gen 33:3) and Joseph's brothers humbled themselves (Gen 50:18). Such self-abasing behaviors imply that the situation is very desperate (Bridge, 2015; Rezetko et al., 2006). Actually, all the offenders—Jacob, Joseph's brothers, and Abigail (on behalf of Nabel) were in life-threatening situations unless they received forgiveness, and were subject to their victims' power to decide their destiny (Rezetko et al., 2006). In other words, if Esau, Joseph, and David, as the victims in these stories, had not had the upper hand in holding the power to decide their offenders' destiny, these stories might not have ended with repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. All three stories seem to reflect that sinful human beings do not want to admit and repent of wrongdoings; it takes something drastic like a life-and-death situation to persuade them to do so. Their reticence to repent reflects the same stubbornness displayed by Israel's failure to repent except under the threat of God's punishment. Schimmel (as cited in Watts & Gulliford, 2004) comments,

There are no instances of a powerful offender requesting forgiveness from, or being forgiven by, a weak victim of his, or of someone forgiving an offender no more, or less, powerful than the victim. These narratives enhance the reputation of the powerful party who 'pardons' and acts mercifully towards an offender who is in a temporary or permanent position of weakness. (pp. 14-15)

In all of these accounts, the role of the offender is crucial to reconciliation because without the offender's repentance there is no human forgiveness. This does not mean that every offender in the OT who repented of his or her wrongdoing was necessarily forgiven by the victim. In fact, for Israel, like most of the ancient world, interpersonal forgiveness was not regarded as a virtue, but "the natural and socially accepted reaction to a real or perceived injury or insult was to redress the balance by getting even, returning the compliment, restoring a damaged self-esteem" (Blenkinsopp, 2008, p. 347). One example of this kind of revenge is the story of David and Shimei in which Shimei makes the gestures of repentance and humility for survival purposes (2 Sam 16:5-16; 19:17-24; 1 Kgs 2:8-9) (Blenkinsopp, 2008). David grants forgiveness to Shimei for cursing him perhaps because of "the large force of armed men at Shimei's

side” (DeVries, 2004, p. 36). However, later, right before David died, he asked his son Solomon to kill Shimei, which he did (1 Kgs 2:46).

Even in the human forgiveness narratives of the OT, the vertical relationship with God seems to be more important than the horizontal relationship with others, because the OT writers believed that God’s sovereign intervention rewrites or reinterprets interpersonal forgiveness (Rezetko et al., 2006). For example, after reconciling with Esau, Jacob saw God’s face in Esau, and Abigail is described as God’s agent to accomplish his will for David (1 Sam 25:32-34) (Rezetko et al., 2006). Joseph’s story is also more focused on God’s sovereign plan of redemption rather than on human forgiveness between Joseph and his brothers (Gen 50:19-21) (Rezetko et al., 2006).

The OT exclusively focuses on the need for repentance to secure both divine and human forgiveness. However, the history of the OT also shows that human beings are stubbornly unwilling to admit their sins and ask for forgiveness, even of their human offendees. Having examined the foregoing narratives on human forgiveness, we will now consider one other important perspective on human forgiveness in the OT.

### **The Victim as God’s Representative in the OT**

The OT emphasizes the victim’s right to receive restitution and the offender’s duty to make things right. The OT makes an implicit analogy between God and the human victim that becomes explicit in the NT (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13; Matt 6:14-15). We have already seen this analogy in the stories of Esau, Joseph, and David. We also saw that God did not listen to Israel’s prayer until the Gibeonites were appeased and Saul’s sin had been forgiven (2 Sam 21:14). We will go on to examine two more cases to understand the human victim’s right in the OT: the guilt offering (Num 5:6-8; Lev 6:1-7) and the restitution of a thief (Exod 22:4, 7, 9).

The guilt offering was required when one sinned with respect to one’s neighbor’s property as seen in Numbers 5:6-8, which is an echo of Leviticus 6:1-7

(Knohl, 2004):

When a man or woman commits any of the sins of mankind [deceiving, robbery, and extortion], acting unfaithfully against the LORD, and that person is guilty, then he shall confess his sins which he has committed, and he shall make restitution in full for his wrong and add to it one-fifth of it, and give it to him whom he has wronged. But if the man has no relative to whom restitution may be made for the wrong, the restitution which is made for the wrong must go to the LORD for the priest, besides the ram of atonement, by which atonement is made for him. (Num 5:6-8)

This passage shows that the guilty party is responsible to confess his or her sin and make restitution to the human victim. Here, confession is listed as an essential step in true repentance. Repentance may begin with an inner sense of guilt or contrition, but it is not complete until confession takes place (Balentine, 2002). In fact, confession is “so deeply anchored in the very structure of the human psyche that the need for it will never disappear” (Gerry, 2002, p. 81). The sinner’s payment of full restitution plus an additional one-fifth of the original value seems to emphasize both the victim’s right to compensation and the offender’s responsibility to repair the damages incurred by the victim beyond the *lex talion* (Lev 24:17-22). It also shows that the focus of the Mosaic Law with regard to human-to-human sin is not only concentrated on the transformation of the sinner, but also on the restoration of the victim (Hayes, 1998; North, 1990). In the passages about the guilt offering, God is identified with the human victim, since a sin against one’s neighbor is described as a sin against God (Num 5:6), and both God and the human victim receive the same restitution: full restoration of what was lost, plus one-fifth (Lev 5:16; 6:5; Num 5:7). Furthermore, God received restitution on the victim’s behalf in cases in which the victim’s family could not receive it (Num 5:8). In fact, “the Hebrew Bible contains a number of passages which clearly support the idea that serious offenses against fellow human beings are regarded as offenses against God (cf. Gen 39:9; 2 Sam 12:9, 10, 13; Prov 14:31; 17:5)” (Krašovec, 1999, p. 344). This implies that sinners should treat their human victims like they treat God, because they are a representative of God. This shows that God supports the human victim’s right to ask the offender to restore

justice, which had been broken by the offender's wrongdoing. Only after appeasing the human victim, can the offender make atonement in order to receive God's forgiveness (Balentine, 2002). Thus, it seems that "in matters of justice man takes priority over God" (Milgrom, 1998, p. 370).

Another example of the victim's right can be found in the law requiring a thief to make double restitution to his victim (Exod 22:4, 7, 9). North (1990) states the following:

Just as sinners need to be restored to God, the criminal needs to be restored to his victim. His victim is the representative and symbol of God, for all sin and crime is ultimately an attempted attack on God, the primary Victim. This is why the criminal is required by God's law to make restitution to his victim. Double restitution restores the victim's economic position prior to the crime, plus it increases his holding to compensate him for the trouble the crime caused him. (p. 180)

The human victim's analogy with God in the OT supports the importance of the victim's rights in human forgiveness. Christians should, therefore, always care for the rights of the human victim as God's image bearer and as personal agent. The analogy between the human victim and God is an important perspective with many implications that will be applied to Christian human forgiveness in chapter 4.

### **Conditional Human Forgiveness**

Because of the focus on the victim's rights and justice in the OT, human forgiveness in the OT was conditional. In the OT neither divine nor human forgiveness is given without repentance (Jones, 1995). Forgiveness in the OT, both divine and human, is only given to those who are worthy. In the narratives on human forgiveness discussed above, human forgiveness was granted when the offender pursued restitution, repentance, or reconciliation through some combination of verbal confession, humility and material compensation. Thus, human forgiveness in the OT was not exercised irrespective of the offender's actions. In the OT, both human and divine forgiveness result in a mitigation of the original penalty after payment. For example, Exodus 21:29-30 reads,

If, however, an ox was previously in the habit of goring and its owner has been

warned, yet he does not confine it and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and its owner also shall be put to death. If a ransom is demanded of him, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatever is demanded of him.

In this passage, the original penalty of death could be replaced with the mitigated penalty of a ransom, if the family of the victim would accept it. This passage implies that the agent of a deceased victim could forgive the offender, if they chose to do so. The Hebrew word for ransom used here, is כִּפָּר, which is the same word used for atonement in rituals seeking divine forgiveness. Thus, human forgiveness, like divine forgiveness, can be also be given in the form of a mitigated penalty through ransom (Exod 21:30). Divine and human forgiveness in the OT are both conditional and are often given in the form of a mitigated penalty, because this arrangement allows the victim to grant forgiveness without completely ignoring issues of justice. In this way, the OT consistently emphasizes the offender's responsibility for repentance, restitution, and reconciliation.

### **The Victim's Honest Emotional Expression in the Psalms**

The psalms of lament (psalms 5, 6, 7, 13, 38, 102) and imprecation (psalms 10, 35, 55, 58, 59, 69, 79, 109, 137, 139), as a part of the canon of God's Word, show that the victim's negative emotional reactions resulting from broken relationships are an important aspect of humanity as God's image bearer (Waltke, 2014; Maier, 2017). In fact, these psalms are a form of prayer, expressing the victim's suffering by the hands of others; they address God, rather than the human offender. They show the victim's various negative emotions, such as shame, depression, anger, and sadness in response to the sufferings resulting from the wrongdoing of others. The victims' emotional language in the form of lament and imprecation are so direct and even violent that they can be regarded "as *catharsis*, a verbal vomiting out of the toxic, emotional waste that is infecting us from the inside" (Maier, 2017, p. 83). The fact this kind of discourse is included in the Bible seems to imply that, from God's perspective, the process of catharsis is necessary for the victim's healing. Thus, the psalmists seem to be aware that

emotional healing necessarily includes honest emotional expression in front of God, rather than suppressing these negative emotions.

The victim's intense emotional aspirations in those psalms are rooted in the OT tradition of emphasizing God's justice. The victim complains and asks with strong emotional expressions that God repay the offense to the offender in order to accomplish his justice. Maier (2017) explains the difference between revenge and justice,

On the surface it may appear difficult to differentiate between these two ideas but they are not the same. One difference is that revenge is usually orchestrated or committed by the victim, whereas justice is rendered by someone other than the victim. A more profound difference is that vigilante justice or revenge does not necessarily validate the victim; it merely inflicts pain on the offender. This is why revenge is so dangerous and dissatisfying. True justice, on the other hand, is executed by someone above both victim and offender who is in a position to render a judgment. (p. 85)

Thus, victims praying for justice and expressing negative emotions against offenders were regarded as very natural in the OT. Additionally, these psalms show that God is on the side of and works for the human victim.

A further important observation is that despite their severe suffering and complaints, the victims in these psalms express strong faith in God's sovereignty even in the face of serious trials (Waltke, 2014; Powlison, 1998). So, most of the lament and imprecatory psalms begin with despair and lamentation, but end in a different mood with hope and praise. For example, Psalm 10 begins with a strong emotional complaint to God: "Why do You stand afar off, O LORD? Why do You hide Yourself in times of trouble?" Yet, this psalm ends with faith and hope in God:

The Lord is King forever and ever; Nations have perished from His land. O Lord, You have heard the desire of the humble; You will strengthen their heart, You will incline Your ear. To vindicate the orphan and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth will no longer cause terror. (Ps 10:16-18)

The sudden change of mood in the psalms is founded on the psalmists' strong faith that God has heard their petitions. In other words, the victims in the OT had the strong belief that God was in control of all suffering that resulted from others' sin and the same belief played a role in producing the victim's positive emotions.

## **Implicit Human Forgiveness in the OT**

Through our study, we have seen that there is no explicit commandment regarding human forgiveness in the OT. Instead, the OT contains implicit teachings on human forgiveness in its early forms. Piper (2012) points out that the OT gives instructions regarding loving one's enemy, a theme that was later developed by the NT writers (Exod 23:4; Prov 24:17, 29; 25:21; Deut 10:18; 1 Kgs 3:10; Rom 12:17, 20; 1 Pet 3:10-12). This kind of love is prescribed in Exodus 23:4-5 (cf. Deut 22:1-3): "If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying helpless under its load, you shall refrain from leaving it to him, you shall surely release it with him."

This law parallels the common ancient Near Eastern law that possessing another person's lost property was considered stealing. The OT law in Exodus 23:4-5 "goes significantly further, though, by stipulating that the principle applies even if the owner is one's enemy" (Baker, 2007, p. 209). Though the virtue of caring for one's undeserving neighbor might be found in the OT, it was not emphasized as often, as explicitly, and as positively as in the NT. Furthermore, the OT includes teachings regarding protection of the weak (Exod 22:16-27; 23:9; Deut 24:10-15; Ezek 18:7, 16) and forbidding retaliation and hatred of one's enemy (Prov 24:17, 29; Lev 19:17-18). Thus, although more implicitly and limited, the OT shows some evidence of neighbor or enemy love.

Leviticus 19:17-18 is particularly important for understanding a biblical view of human forgiveness, because the NT commandments regarding human forgiveness seem to be built upon this passage (Carson, 2002; Bash, 2015; Cheong & DiBlasio, 2007).

You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD (Lev 19:17-18).

Even though this passage is not specifically about loving one's enemy, it is implied, because it describes a relational context of conflict, holding grudges, and vengeance. In this passage, love is to be directed to one's neighbor and is described with negative commands prohibiting retaliation, keeping record of wrongs, and hatred, rather than encouraging a positive response such as mercy. By contrast, love of one's enemy in the NT is explicit and seemingly limitless (Matt 5:43-44; Luke 6:27). Overcoming negative emotions toward one's offender, such as hatred, unforgiveness, and the desire for retaliation is essential to the process of true forgiveness (Worthington, 2006). Thus, in spite of its limited scope, the commandment of neighbor love in Leviticus 19:17-18 provides an implicit foundation for human forgiveness in the OT. This passage in particular laid the foundation for the principle of confrontation in relation to forgiveness, since God commands that the victim should reprove the offender in a loving manner, because the offender's apology will promote forgiveness and reconciliation by narrowing the gap caused by the injustice. This tradition of confrontation in the OT was passed down to first-century Jews, including to the Essenes and Pharisees, and even to Jesus and the early Church (Illian, 2010).

Other OT hints regarding human forgiveness can be seen in the instructions to cancel debts and release slaves (Deut 15:1-18) and the year of jubilee in which land would be returned to its original owner (Lev 25:8-10) (Redlich, 1937). Although such provisions are only given to fellow Israelites, these traditions are connected with the story in Matt 18:23-34 in which forgiveness is described as canceling debts and freeing a debtor from jail. One can find implicit teachings on human forgiveness in the book of Proverbs as well (17:9; 19:11; 24:17-18; 25:21-22). For example, Proverbs 17:9 says "He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends". Here, 'cover a transgression' (מְכַסֵּה-פֶשַׁע) is translated in the NRSV as "forgives an affront", and covering over a person's sin is the biblical meaning of forgiveness (cf. Neh 4:5; Ps 32:1) (Gowan, 2010). Proverbs 19:11 says, "a man's discretion makes him



slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook a transgression”. The phrase ‘slow to anger’ is used to describe God in Exodus 34:6 and ‘overlook an offense’ would seem to be synonymous with human forgiveness (Murphy, 1998). Such passages demonstrate how the OT makes implicit reference to forgiveness without directly mentioning it. We will now turn to looking at how human forgiveness began to be developed more explicitly in the intertestamental period.

### **Explicit Human Forgiveness in the Intertestamental Period**

Finally, teaching on human forgiveness became explicit for the first time in Second Temple literature, such as the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha (Redlich, 1937; Barton & Reimer, 1996). It did not, however, make an abrupt appearance. Rather we have seen the development of a strong interest in interpersonal human relationships and individual moral responsibility since the prophetic era, both of which served as the foundation for the remarkable development of human forgiveness in the intertestamental period. Redlich (1937) points out that in the intertestamental period “the individual Jew, by being recognized as a political unit and by being given a recognized place in community life, saw a new meaning of individual ethical responsibility” (p. 72). The OT commandments banning retaliation and encouraging love for one’s enemy were confirmed and developed in this era. For example, there are teachings about praying for one’s offender in the *Testament of Joseph* 18:2.

At this time, human forgiveness was listed among works of righteousness or virtues. For example, the *Testament of Gad* describes unconditional human forgiveness in detail:

Love ye one another from the heart; and if a man sin against thee, speak peaceably to him, and in thy soul hold not guile; and if he repent and confess, forgive him. But if he deny it, do not get into a passion with him, lest catching the poison from thee he take to swearing and so thou sin doubly. . . . But if he be shameless and persists in his wrongdoing, even so forgive him from the heart, and leave to God the avenging. (6:3-4, 7)

This passage explains the psychological reason for forgiving an offender who does not repent: “If he does not repent, there is to be no hatred lest he get poisoned by your anger, and, to his wrong, add the guilt of cursing you, and thus you become guilty of a double sin, namely, his unbridled wrath and the increase of his guilt” (Redlich, 1937, p. 91). This kind of generous forgiveness parallels unconditional forgiveness in the NT (Matt 18:21-35).

In addition, there was the strong urging to ban retaliation and the promise of God’s judgment of the human offender; *Secrets of Enoch 50:3-4* reads,

Endure for the sake of the Lord every wound, every injury, every evil word and attack. If ill-requitals befall you, return them not either to neighbour or enemy, because the Lord will return them for you and be your avenger on the day of great judgment, that there be no avenging here among men.

This passage is very similar to NT writings, such as Hebrews 10:30 and Romans 12:19-21. Thus, Reimer points out that “in the world of early Judaism and nascent Christianity, notions of interpersonal forgiveness overlap almost entirely” (Barton & Reimer, 1996, p. 281). For example, in the book of Sirach, human forgiveness is described as a means of securing divine forgiveness (28:2): “forgive thy neighbor the injury, and then when thou prayest, thy sins will be forgiven.” This verse seems to foreshadow the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 6:14-15. However, in spite of these references to unconditional forgiveness, it was far from universally embraced (Redlich, 1937; Bash, 2013). For example, “Vengeance and hatred of enemies are taught” in some sources from this era (Judith 13:7; Jubilees 21:19) (Redlich, 1937, p. 93) and in the book of Sirach, mention is made of the blessed man “who lived to see his enemy’s fall” (25:7). In *the Assumption of Moses 10:10*, Moses says: “Thou shalt look from on high and shalt see thy enemies in Gehenna, And thou shalt recognize them and rejoice, And thou shalt give thanks and confess thy Creator.” Bash (2013) states,

What we can probably say is that person-to-person forgiveness may have been something that Jewish teachers had begun to reflect on in the pre-Christian and early Christian period. Nevertheless, even taking the Mishnah as a whole, there is nothing comparable to the writings on forgiveness we find in the New Testament. (p. 383)

In the intertestamental period, the concept of human forgiveness is mostly treated as a prudent policy or legal administration and was limited to the Jewish community. Conditional forgiveness was the predominant form of Jewish human forgiveness in this era, in spite of a few remarks reflecting unconditional forgiveness (Schimmel, 2002; Konstan, 2010; Bash, 2007). Thus, in traditional Judaism, the offender's role of initiating reconciliation through repentance was emphasized more than the victim's role of granting forgiveness (Bash, 2007, 2013; Griswold & Konstan, 2012). This stands in stark contrast with the model of human forgiveness in the NT, which emphasized the victim's role of granting forgiveness. Jewish traditions tend to treat human forgiveness as a precondition for divine forgiveness (Bash, 2007). The Mishnah, for instance, says the following about the Day of Atonement: "For transgressions done between man and the Omnipresent, the Day of Atonement atones. For transgressions between man and man, the Day of Atonement atones, only if the man will regain the good will of his friend" (Neusner, 2002, p. 14). Jewish wisdom teaches that no one, not even God, can take away the victim's choice to forgive the offender (Bash, 2007). Still, in contemporary Jewish thought, repentance is emphasized more than forgiveness (Watts & Gulliford, 2004; Schimmel, 2002). Thus, the Christian doctrine of atonement through the death of an innocent man, the Messiah, without the precondition of the offender's repentance was completely unknown in Judaism (Jones, 1995).

### **Conclusion**

The OT is primarily concerned with the vertical relationship between God and Israel and so, almost exclusively focuses on divine forgiveness. In this chapter, we have examined how divine forgiveness developed throughout OT revelation. In the patriarchal era we see somewhat rudimentary revelations of divine forgiveness in the first promise (Gen 3:15) and the primitive worship system (Gen 4). The narratives concerning divine forgiveness from this era, involve the crucial role of a mediator, such as Abraham, who

had an intimate relationship with God. In Moses' era, the concept of divine forgiveness was sharpened by the introduction of the written law and the institution of Israel's special relationship with God as his chosen people, thereby differentiating them from the pagans. God strictly disciplined his people, because they had been influenced by Egyptian culture and utilized conditional forgiveness based on their obedience or disobedience. In Moses' age in particular, divine forgiveness was revealed to entail atonement through sacrificial rituals. God taught his people the rule of justice through the process of repentance, restitution, and partial punishment. Thus, early in the OT, repentance was emphasized both in relationship with God and others. From the time of Joshua until the exile, there was an emphasis on Israel's need to repent in order to secure God's forgiveness. However, after centuries of failure, Israel was sent into exile. In exile, the scattered Jews believed that divine forgiveness was received through various righteous and pious works with regard to God and one's neighbors.

With regard to human forgiveness, the OT teaching is largely implicit with the recording of only a few stories on human forgiveness. In such teachings, the offender's role of initiating reconciliation through repentance and restitution was emphasized and the victim's response served as an analogy with God. Human forgiveness was more significantly developed during the intertestamental period. Those teachings found their way into the NT, where we find the fullest model of human forgiveness revealed.

Another theme on human forgiveness found in the OT narratives is that offenders resist admitting their wrongdoing and are sometimes only driven to repent by the threat of death held over them by victims in strong positions. In this respect, one can question whether these offenders would have repented if their victims had not been in such positions of authority. We turn, next, to the NT teaching on divine and human forgiveness.

### CHAPTER 3

#### FORGIVENESS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT: JUST AND GRACIOUS

Forgiveness has been remarkably developed in the NT through Jesus, who is the embodiment of the ultimate revelation of biblical forgiveness. Wellum (2016) states that “perhaps the most significant indication of Jesus’s self-identity concerning the purpose and work of God comes in his forgiveness of sins” (p. 166). According to claims in the NT (Matt 5:17; Heb 1:1-2), all divine teachings to the Israelites in the OT pointed to and are fulfilled in Jesus. Therefore, as Wellum states correctly, “the promised forgiveness of sin and covenantal reconciliation between God and man is fulfilled in the person of Jesus” (2016, p. 167). This is the essence of Christian forgiveness. OT and Judaic traditions taught about divine forgiveness, but the NT teaching on the embodiment of forgiveness in the person of Jesus Christ was novel (Jones, 1995). In order to study divine forgiveness in the NT, the focus needs to examine more than just the word forgiveness, since in the NT redemption or liberation through ransom is related to the forgiveness of sins (Eph 1:7; Col 1:14) (Ridderbos, 1997). Divine forgiveness in the OT typically taught that the process of forgiveness and reconciliation begins with the sinners’ atoning activity the nature of which is propitiation, “turning aside the wrath of God,” as a repenting or disciplining process through rituals or the mediator’s intercession (Fluhrer, 2010, p. 33). In other words, divine forgiveness in the OT was granted after sinners made an atoning sacrifice, even though the act of forgiveness was ultimately dependent upon

the will of God himself. Thus, the model of divine forgiveness in the OT was a form of conditional forgiveness, forgiveness only being granted if the sinner had engaged in an atoning activity, such as repentance or restitution.

However, divine forgiveness in the NT is remarkably different from this OT conditional model, because the atoning activity is realized through Jesus only by grace and precedes the sinner's action of repentance. As a result, rather than being conditional, divine forgiveness in the NT is unconditional in the sense that it is prepared and offered independent of and before the sinner's activity. Another critical point in the NT development of forgiveness is its strong emphasis on lateral human forgiveness. While the Israelites in the OT were not required to forgive those who had sinned against them and could even pray to God for retribution, Christians in the NT are required to forgive their offender. Human forgiveness is directly related to divine forgiveness; Christians who receive God's forgiveness are to reflect God in all aspects of their life (Col 3:10; Rom 8:19; Gal 4:19), meaning they are commanded to forgive their offenders, just as in Christ God forgave them (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13). Willetts (1964) mentions the importance of grasping God's forgiveness:

Christianity is essentially about forgiveness, forgiveness offered by God to man, but also Christianity is about forgiveness between men. A right understanding of the meaning of God's forgiveness is essential to creative Christian living. A wrong understanding of the meaning of God's forgiveness leads religious people into arid deserts of religiosity and is often the cause of those who need the reality of the forgiveness of God, turning from the Church. (p. 12)

Christians, desiring to live a life of forgiveness, need to understand prototypical divine forgiveness, which includes lateral human forgiveness. Now, we will examine the ultimate form of divine forgiveness in the NT which is revealed through Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

### **The Embodiment of Biblical Forgiveness: Jesus, the God-man**

Wellum (2016) states that everything Jesus did, he did as the God-man. In fact,

as God's perfect image (Col 1:15), Jesus' entire earthly existence from his childhood to his resurrection is a genuine revelation about who God is and a demonstration of how man as the *imago Dei* should live. In the Gospels, Jesus not only exemplified God's forgiveness of sinners, he also demonstrated the powerful act of forgiving his offenders. This is possible, because the Bible, for example Hebrews, portrays "Jesus as both truly God and truly human, like his Father in every respect and like humans in every respect" (Bauckham, 2008, p. 236). Thus, the fact that Christians are commanded to forgive one another is understandable because of Jesus, the God-man (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13). Understanding NT divine and human forgiveness requires examining Jesus' granting of forgiveness.

### **The Ministry of John the Baptist**

Before looking at Jesus' embodiment of forgiveness, the preparatory ministry of John the Baptist will be discussed, because it sheds light on the NT concept of Jesus' forgiveness of sins. As Jesus' forerunner, John the Baptist, a minister in the tradition of the OT and Intertestamental period, emphasized repentance through his ministry of baptism (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3) (Klassen, 1966; Vos, 1975). His baptism was one 'of repentance for the forgiveness of sins' (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3) because of its emphasis on repentance. However, his ritual of a 'baptism of repentance' did not result in forgiveness automatically, but it was rather a sign, a public confession, that those baptized were ready to receive forgiveness from the One John pointed to (Bash, 2007). In other words, "John can baptize for the remission of sins, but Jesus is the One who forgives sins" (Beach, 2015, p. 182).

John's baptism is different from Jesus' forgiveness. As examined in the previous chapter, for first century Jewish people, forgiveness of sin was redemption or covenant renewal, the end of exile, which was the punishment for Israel's sins (Wright, 1997). John's baptism should be understood in this light. So, for John the Baptist, the

coming Messianic age is introduced by a baptism for the forgiveness of sins, which is a new exodus for Israel, analogous to passing through the Red Sea. However, John's scope of God's forgiveness was limited by ethnicity, and so it is different from that of Jesus who offers forgiveness of sins not only to the Israelites, but to all people (Wright, 1997). Jesus' universal scope of God's forgiveness was very offensive to many of the Jews of his day.

John's baptism is also different in that he did not require the recipients of his baptism to make an atoning sacrifice. As mentioned in Chapter Two, during the Intertestamental period, various rituals had been substituted for the OT means of divine forgiveness. Thus, many scholars agree that John's baptism functioned as a symbol of a sacrificial ritual with John taking on the role of an OT priest (Kraeling, 1951; Bash, 2007; Dunn, 2003). Bash explains that this is "because John and the people expected atonement and forgiveness to come through the coming kingdom of heaven (Matt 3:2), the salvation of God (Luke 3:6) and the baptism with the Holy Spirit (Matt 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16)" (2007, p. 82), instead of animal rituals. Thus, John's baptism of repentance can be regarded as a transitional form until true divine forgiveness was brought about through the atonement of Jesus Christ (Vos, 1975).

John's baptism prepares us for God's forgiveness in the NT because of its uniqueness, in the sense that Jesus is baptized in the place of sinners (Mark 1:9; Matt 3:13-15), as he would later hang on the cross in the place of sinners for the forgiveness of sins (Beach, 2015). This implies that the NT concept of forgiveness of sin through Jesus cannot be understood without this idea of substitution for the offender.

### **Jesus, The Subject of Divine Forgiveness**

In the NT, Jesus is always described as the subject of divine forgiveness. God's forgiveness through Jesus is not just limited to his atoning death on the cross, but is also visible in and through his public life and after his resurrection and ascension (Purves,



2015; Jones, 1995). Jones (1995) mentions how Jesus Christ, as the God-man, declared throughout all of his life that “God’s forgiveness is present for all” by “embodying forgiveness as a way of life” (p. 120). MacArthur (2009) states that forgiveness is the reason for Jesus’ incarnation, his coming to this world (John 3:17), and the purpose of his death. Jesus invited people to God’s forgiveness by saying “I haven’t come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32), and the Gospel writers, consequently, describe Jesus as granting divine forgiveness to people who committed sin against others and God (Matt 9:2; Luke 7:48; 19:9-10; 23:34, 43; John 5:4; 8:11). Other books in the NT explain how the now resurrected and ascended Jesus, at the right hand of God, still ministers as an advocate for forgiveness of sins (1 John 2:1; Acts 5:30-31; 13:36-38; cf. Heb 7:24-25; 10:12). First-century Christians understood that “the exalted Jesus participates in God’s unique sovereignty over all things” (Bauckham, 2008, p. 20). So for the early Christians it was very natural to think that the risen Lord Jesus forgave sins (Martin, 2006; Branscomb, 1934). For this reason, Stephen prayed to Jesus standing at the right hand of God for forgiveness of his killers (Acts 7:56-60).

Although Jesus taught the disciples to pray to God the Father, and not to himself, for forgiveness of sins (Matt 6:12; 6:14-15; 18:35; Mark 11:25; Luke 23:34), through many events in his life, Jesus demonstrated publicly that he and the Father are one and, therefore, he forgives like the Father, for example in the case of the paralytic (Matt 9:2; Mark 2:5; Luke 5:20), the woman known as a sinner (Luke 7:47-50), and Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10). The forgiveness Jesus granted to the paralytic, the sinful woman, and Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) is not human forgiveness, since Jesus is not the human victim of the paralytic, the woman’s sin, or Zacchaeus but divine forgiveness which was believed to be granted only by God.

In the case of the paralytic, Jesus proclaims to the one who asked for healing: “Son, your sins are forgiven” (Matt 9:2; Mark 2:5; Luke 5:20). Here, “Jesus surprisingly refers not to the man’s physical condition but to his spiritual state, and he takes the

initiative to declare the man's sins forgiven without any prompting from the sick man himself" (Blomberg, 1992, p. 153). Jesus seems to agree with the dominant Jewish belief of that time that the reason for the man's disease was spiritual in nature, and the healing of the disease would be the evidence of being granted divine forgiveness (Branscomb, 1934). This story concludes with the statement that Jesus has the same authority as God the Father in forgiving sin (Mark 2:10; Matt 9:6; Luke 5:24). In other words, Jesus sought to demonstrate that he is equal with God. In fact, Jesus' self-understanding as divine forgiver is also shown in Matthew 25:31-46 and Mark 14:62-64, where Jesus identifies himself as the eschatological judge or forgiver, a position that, in first century Judaism, was believed to be assumed only by God (Grindheim, 2015); for example, Philo, a Jew who was contemporary with Jesus, "considered it to be blasphemous to claim for oneself the prerogatives of God" (Grindheim, 2015, p. 134).

In the story of the woman who has been forgiven her many sins (Luke 7:36-50), Jesus is also portrayed as having divine authority to forgive sin. Jesus was invited into the house of a Pharisee by the name of Simon. A morally sinful woman wetted Jesus' feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair and then poured perfume on his feet. The reason for her crying seems to have been joy and thankfulness to Jesus who had forgiven her of her sins; verse 47 indicates that Jesus sees her behavior as an expression of love to him for his forgiveness of her sins (Jones, 1995).

The story of Zaccheus (Luke 19:1-10) is another that shows Jesus has the divine authority to forgive sins. Right after Zacchaeus' decision to give away his possessions, an activity demonstrating his true repentance, Jesus says: "Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham" (v. 10). Although the word forgiveness is not used in this proclamation, salvation can be equated with forgiveness (Gowan, 2010; see Col 1:14).

The above demonstrates that Jesus, as the Second Person of the Trinity, had the authority to forgive sins. This truth led the early Christian church to believe that

forgiveness of sins is accomplished by Jesus as divine forgiver (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; 10:43; 13:38-39; 1 John 2:12) (Martin, 2006; Branscomb, 1934). Thus, to understand more about forgiveness, we need to examine not only Jesus' atonement through his death, but also Jesus' acts of forgiveness during his life.

### **Jesus and Repentance**

Jesus' forgiveness of the paralytic without any explicit repentance is very different from OT and Jewish traditions where repentance was a necessary precondition for securing divine forgiveness (Carter, 2016). In fact, Jesus' forgiving the paralytic is even inconsistent with his own teaching about repentance. Jesus insists that the sinner's repentance is necessary to secure divine forgiveness (Luke 24:47; cf. Mark 4:12; Matt 4:17); after all, this was the purpose of his coming to the world "not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32). In this respect, it was very natural that his first public preaching was about repentance: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 4:17). Furthermore, Jesus rebuked people for their unrepentance (Matt 11:20; Luke 13:3, 5).

However, some evidence about the paralytic's repentance may be implicit (Bash 2007; 2011), for we know that Jesus knows peoples' thoughts and hearts (Matt 9:2-4; Mark 2:5-8; Luke 5:20-22). In this respect, he is equal with God in the OT who is described as the divine forgiver who ponders the heart and can forgive sinners according to the repentant state of their hearts, even without outwardly expressed repentance (Deut 29:18-20; cf. Jer 11:20; 18:23; Prov 21:2). Furthermore, according to John (John 2:25; 16:30; 21:17), Jesus is omniscient (Grudem, 2000). For these reasons, Jesus must have also known the inner state of the paralytic (Carter, 2016; MacArthur, 2012).

The sinful woman in Luke 7:36-50 also showed no explicit repentance. However, one could assume that she might have repented already because of her behavioral expression of love to Jesus, such as wiping Jesus' feet with her hair and

pouring perfume on him (Hägerland, 2011). Bash (2007) states that the sinful woman “demonstrated her repentance by anointing Jesus: her humility and evident brokenness also confirm that she was repentant” (p. 87). Thus, Jesus’ words, “your sins have been forgiven” (v. 48) might be a reaffirmation of this forgiveness. Furthermore, Jesus knew Simon’s thoughts. Simon had said to himself, “if this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner” (Luke 7:39). Luke writes in verse 40 that Jesus ‘answers’ or ‘defends himself’ to Simon’s thoughts. The verb ‘answer’ (*ἀποκρίνομαι*) suggests he was replying to a presupposed question (BDAG). It means that Jesus perceived Simon’s thought (Snodgrass, 2011). Jesus replies by telling a parable about a gracious money lender who forgives two people who owe him different amounts. The fact that this parable seems to refer to Simon and the woman evidences that Jesus knew Simon’s thoughts (Stein, 1993). Consequently, we can think, also in this case, that Jesus, as God’s equal, must have known of the heart repentance of the woman, who as a result of Jesus’ forgiveness receives a new identity:

Simon assumed the woman was a sinner, but Jesus identified her as a forgiven sinner. An implicit question in the narrative is, who is righteous? Simon was assumed by the community—and probably by himself—to be righteous, but Jesus said the woman was more righteous than Simon. (Snodgrass, 2011, p. 141).

A new identity was prepared for Zaccheus as well (Luke 19). Unlike other stories where there is no explicit evidence of the sinner’s repentance, Zacchaeus’s repentance is clear without a doubt. Voluntarily and generously he makes restitution to his victims or the poor (v. 8), which is evidence that his repentance was genuine (Gowan, 2010). Furthermore, the expression of “and received him joyfully” (v. 6) is a Lukan indication of true salvation (cf. Acts 8:8; 8:39). Now, Zacchaeus, who had been called as a sinner (Luke 19:7), comes to have the identity of “a son of Abraham” (Luke 19:9) as a result of Jesus’ forgiveness.

## **Proactive Creator of Divine Forgiveness**

The presence of repentance on the part of the sinner deserves special attention in Jesus' forgiving of sins. The OT teaches that only the repentant can receive forgiveness. However, this does not lead Jesus to always require the sinner's repentance before offering forgiveness of sin. For Jesus repentance is both a necessary condition and an unavoidable response of sinners in the process of securing God's forgiveness (Jones, 1995; Bash, 2007). Jesus' three parables about the lost sheep, coin, and son, in Luke 15, "form a tightly knit unit with a single, strongly Lukan theme—God's love for outcasts and sinners" (Stein, 1993, p. 400). All of them provide good examples of God's pre-offering of forgiveness and the sinner's response through repentance. In fact, Jesus repeatedly emphasizes the strong need of the sinner's repentance in these three parables (vv. 7, 10, 32): "there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (v. 7); "I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (v. 10); and "we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found" (v. 32).

Nevertheless, in spite of Jesus' repetitive emphasis on the sinner's repentance in these parables, the actual content of the stories is about the forgiver's proactive forgiving, rather than the forgiven's repentance. Forgiveness in all three stories is initiated unilaterally and offered both by the father and the owners of the sheep and the coin, who long to get back what they have 'lost'. Thus, God is being described as an initiating seeker of lost sinners. Baillie (1948) points out that the God Jesus reveals deviates starkly from the God revealed in Jewish traditions before him:

What kind of God, then, do we find in His teaching? Is it a God who would wait to be discovered? No, indeed. It is a God who takes the initiative, a God who is always beforehand with men, a 'prevenient' God who seeks His creatures before they seek Him. . . . whether there was anything quite new in Jesus' teaching, anything which no Jewish prophet or rabbi had ever said before Him, singled out this one thing as quite distinctive: the picture of the Divine Shepherd going out into the wilderness to seek a lost sheep, the picture of God as not merely receiving those who turn to Him,

but as taking the initiative in seeking those who have not turned to Him. (p. 63)

In the first two parables of the sheep and the coin, Jesus, instead of portraying how the lost repent, emphasizes the owners' strong desire and joy of finding the lost. This joy of finding the lost is, however, paralleled with the joy of the sinner's repentance (vv. 6-7; vv. 9-10). In other words, it implies that the repentance of the lost is directly related with their being found by the seeker. The lost sinners responded with repentance to God, who took the initiative to seek them and offer forgiveness. So here again, the lost sinner's repentance is a necessary condition to secure forgiveness, even though the repentance did not precede the owner's "seeking" and "finding" or offering forgiveness. In Jesus' third parable of the prodigal son, the son's repentance is a prerequisite for his receiving forgiveness, but the father seemed to have already forgiven or accepted (v. 20) his son before his explicit repentance (v. 21) (Bash, 2007; Volf, 1996). Consequently, the father's forgiveness and the son's repentance later together brought about true reconciliation. Soon, Christ himself would embody this initiating, seeking God on the cross, by being the atoning sacrifice for sinners, while they were still lost and, thus, he showed the fulfillment of divine forgiveness. The three parables, then, teach that the offended is to proactively find the lost by means of forgiveness, and the role of the offender is to return to the lost relationship by means of repentance.

### **Habitual Forgiver in Weakness**

The NT demonstrates Jesus Christ, the perfect image of God (Col 1:15), exemplifies the ideal model of Christian human forgiveness (1 Pet 2:21-25; Luke 23:34; Col 3:13; Eph 4:32-5:2). As the second Adam, Jesus rejects the human life cycle of sin, guilt, and, revenge by living instead as habitual forgiver (Jones, 1995). He did this in diverse ways. For example, his table fellowship with social outcasts labelled as sinners, such as tax collectors, Gentiles, and Samaritans (Luke 15:2; cf. Mark 2:15-17) is a different way of inviting to God's forgiveness and to the life of communion with God and others (Jones, 1995; Piper, 2012; Volf, 1996). He forgave the woman with many sins

(Luke 7:36-50), the woman caught in adultery (John 8:3-11), the paralytic (Mark 4), Zacchaeus (Luke 19), and Peter who confessed his sinfulness (Luke 5:8). He embraced the tax collector as his disciple (Luke 5:27-28) as well as people with various diseases who had been excluded from that society (Volf, 1996). Jesus' public life of forgiving and embracing sinners as friends, became one of the important reasons why he was excluded from that society and killed (Luke 5:30; 6:6-11; Matt 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6). As we will see, even his death did not prevent him from becoming a habitual forgiver; rather he became the perfect forgiver while he was exposed on the cross as a shameful and weak victim. After his resurrection, he granted forgiveness to Peter and the other disciples who had betrayed him (Mark 14:50; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:27; John 21). Jesus continues his ministry, now that he is ascended, by being an advocate of sinners for the forgiveness of their sins (1 John 2:1). Thus, Jesus has lived and is living a forgiving life.

According to the NT writers, Jesus' life was marked not only by forgiving, but also by being familiar with weakness, even from the time of his birth. Matthew's genealogy of Jesus points to the low condition in which Jesus was born. Matthew highlights that every baby boy became the father of another child (the word "γεννάω" means to "become the father of" and is used 39 times (BDAG, p. 193). As a result, Matthew's audience would expect this genealogy to end with Joseph becoming the father of Jesus. However, instead, he is described as "Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah" (v. 16). The relative pronoun 'of whom' is feminine and so it refers to Mary only (Evans, 2012). Thus, the conclusion of this long genealogy is somewhat embarrassing, because the child Jesus does not have a father, which is a most essential factor in a Hebrew genealogy. Jesus' weakness is, furthermore, demonstrated in this genealogy by the mention of four women open to accusation of improper sexual conduct, such as Tamar (v.3), Rahab, Ruth (v.5), and Uriah's wife (v.6), suggesting that "Mary is the fifth woman in the messianic line that for one reason or another was vulnerable to accusation." (Evans, 2012, p. 36). Therefore, this genealogy

implies that the baby Jesus came into this world already socially marginalized. But the child's suffering consists in more than just not having a father. As soon as he was born, Jesus was faced with the threat of death by Herod (2:3). Herod's angry infanticide is a symbol of Israel's rejection of the Messiah. Most scholars agree that Jesus' infancy narrative becomes an adumbration of the life and passion he will experience. For Matthew, the Kingdom of God begins from this little seed born in weakness (Matt 13:24-32). Thus "Jesus is modeled best among the most powerless, not among the powerful." (Keener, 1999, p. 449). In his life Jesus experienced much suffering to the point of him praying in tears (Heb 5:7-9). The prophecies (Isa 42:1-3; 53:1-8) in the OT also describe the Christ as a person characterized by weakness and vulnerability.

Jesus' weakness is, furthermore, seen in his shameful death on the cross. The best example of Jesus as habitual forgiver is the fact that even on the cross, Jesus prayed for his executioners to be forgiven by God (Luke 23:34). Precisely when "Christ's weakness plummeted to its lowest depths in the gruesome shame of the cross" (Ortlund, 2010, p. 103), he demonstrated ultimate forgiveness. Jesus became the most merciful "forgiving victim" at the very time he became the most humiliated person, being tortured, mocked, and taunted as he died on the cross (2 Cor 13:4) (Bash, 2007, p. 92). Then, he prayed: "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

However, there is some debate as to whether Luke 23:34 refers to Jesus' forgiveness or just his praying to the Father to forgive his executioners. What is clear is that Jesus is asking divine forgiveness for his offenders in the form of a prayer. We cannot know whether the executioners received God's forgiveness or not, and this might not be the concern of Luke (Carson, 2002). This passage is unlike other passages, such as those of the paralytic (Mark 4) or Zacchaeus (Luke 19), where Jesus grants divine forgiveness rather than human forgiveness, since he was not the direct human victim of the sin. Luke 23:34, however, is an example of Jesus' implicitly demonstrating human



forgiveness, because, as the victim of violence, he is concerned directly about the wellbeing of his own offenders. Carson (2002) states that “the most important thing about this prayer is not the precise way in which it was answered or the precise degree of guilt that the men incurred and for which they needed forgiveness, but the way it discloses Jesus’ heart” (p. 78). Thus, whichever side is taken on this issue, Jesus is exposed as habitual forgiver. As a result, Jesus demonstrates perfect human forgiveness and love at his weakest moment. Flavel (1836), a seventeenth-century Puritan, recognizes this as the true nature of the Christian life:

That to forgive enemies, and beg forgiveness for them, is the true character and property of the Christian spirit. Thus did Christ: “Father, forgive them.” And thus did Stephen, in imitation of Christ, “And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge” (Acts 7:59, 60). This suits with the rule of Christ, “But I say unto you, love your enemies; bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of God your Father which is in heaven” (Matt 5:44, 45). (p.299)

Jesus is an inspiring and powerful example, showing that one can change one’s weakest moment of being a victim who experiences grave offense into a moment of most excellent forgiveness. Flavel (1836) states as follows:

The more deep and tender our resentments of wrongs and injuries are, the more excellent is our forgiveness of them; so that a forgiving spirit doth not exclude sense of injuries, but the sense of injuries graces the forgiveness of them. (p. 299)

### **Jesus’ Identity, Humility, and Empathy**

The forgiveness Jesus demonstrates is truly exceptional. Researchers report that a victim who is prosperous and powerful tends to forgive more easily than a victim who has suffered much (Worthington, 1998; 2006; Jones, 1995). OT examples of forgiveness hint at this principle: forgiving victims, such as Esau, Joseph, and David were in powerful positions as they decided the destiny of their offenders. In other words, it might have been more difficult to forgive his brothers, had Joseph not become a socially powerful politician but remained a poor Hebrew slave with his siblings still being very

successful. In this respect, the forgiving attitude of Jesus, a man acquainted with rejection, suffering, and pain, is extraordinary. The difference is that in spite of much suffering and weakness, Jesus was conscious of himself not as a weak victim, but as a strong divine warrior able to defeat Satan (Luke 11:17-23) who, from an OT and Jewish perspective, was only defeatable by God (Grindheim, 2011). For example, according to Jewish tradition, only God Himself healed the sick and “Jesus identifies his own miracles with these prophecies regarding God’s own acts” (Grindheim, 2011, p. 52). Jesus always knows his own identity as the God-man or the Son (Matt 5:17; 12:8; Mark 10:45; Luke 2:49; 4:18; 7:22-23; 19:10; John 14:9). For example, John the Baptist, not sure of Jesus’ identity, asked if Jesus was “the Expected One” (Luke 7:20; Matt 11:3), to which Jesus replies who he is and who John is (Matt 5:14; Luke 7:21-28) (McKnight, 2010). In fact, already since he was young (Luke 2:49), Jesus identified himself as Son of God by saying God is his Father. And before his public ministry (Matt 3:17), Jesus is tempted in regard to his identity: “If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread” (Matt 4:3). Jesus, knowing who he is, does not need to prove his identity (Snodgrass, 2011).

In addition to, and in spite of, his clear awareness of his own identity as the God-man with divine authority and power, Jesus describes himself as a gentle (*πραῦς*) and humble (*ταπεινός*) person in relationship with others. When Jesus invites sinners to God’s forgiveness and discipleship, he says: “Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart” (Matt 11:28-30). Here, *ταπεινός* (“humble”) literally means “low” and denotes poor and undistinguished status (Jas 1:9) (BDAG; Evans, 1992). Philippians 2:1-11 elucidates the meaning of Jesus Christ being *ταπεινός* (“humble”) better than any passage. Paul, knowing that his readers understand the Roman world, intentionally describes Jesus as servant, which denotes his humble social status, not worthy of pride or self-respect (v.7). This servant’s humility reaches its climax with the

punishment on the cross, the sign of public shame (v.8) (Hellerman, 2003):

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Phil 2:5-8)

In Philippians 2:3, *ταπεινοφροσύνη* (“humility”), meaning “lowliness of mind,” is presented as the primary element to promote relational unity in a church, which knew much grumbling and arguing (Phil 2:14) (Fee, 1995, p. 187). Biblically, humility is an empathetic virtue, concerned with surrendering selfishness for the sake of others (Phil 2:4) on the basis of accurate self-awareness (Fee, 1995). Bauckham (2008) says about Philippians 2: 6-11 that the humility and empathy of Jesus Christ is rooted in his understanding of his own identity as the God-man who is a suffering servant, humiliated and exalted (Isa 45:22-2; 52:13; 53:12-13; 57:15):

The pre-existent Christ, being equal with God, shared the divine glory in heaven. But he did not consider his equality with God something he should use for his own advantage. He did not understand his equality with God as a matter of being served by others, but as something he could express in service, obedience, self-renunciation and self-humiliation for others. Therefore, he renounced the outward splendor of the heavenly court for the life of a human being on earth, one who lived his obedience to God in self-humiliation even to the point of the peculiarly shameful death by crucifixion, the death of a slave. This radical self-renunciation was his way of expressing and enacting his equality with God, and therefore (v.9) it qualified him to exercise the unique divine sovereignty over all things. . . . This is the way in which the one and only God reveals his identity to his whole creation and is acknowledged as God by his whole creation. (p. 42)

Humility is always accompanied by an empathetic attitude of understanding the other’s position (Phil 2:4). Jesus identified with sinners through the incarnation and through his death on the cross, lowering himself in the most unimaginable way possible (Phil 2:6-8). In Jesus self-awareness of his divine identity as God and perfect humility and empathy are conjoint. Thus, Philippians 2:6-11 is an example of how Christ’s humility and empathy from his birth to his atoning death are founded on his self-understanding as a suffering servant and God-man. In other words, divine forgiveness through Jesus’ atonement is directly related with Jesus’ identity. “Being found in appearance as a man,

he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:8). Jesus, as God, had perfect power and self-identity; yet, he could be perfectly empathetic and humble, always depending on God and turning all the glory to God and not to himself (Mark 10:18; John 8:26-29; 5:18-19, 30; 10:17-18; 14:8-11). Jesus summons Christians to identify with him in demonstrating humility and empathy toward others (Mark 10:42-45; Matt 5:13-14; 23:11-12; Luke 14:8-11; John 13:14). Encouragingly, when Christians confess their sins, they are asking forgiveness from the humblest and most empathetic forgiver.

### **Jesus and the Person of the Holy Spirit**

From the humble moment of conception (Luke 1:15) and throughout Jesus’ life of suffering, the Spirit was with Jesus. “From womb to tomb to throne, the Spirit was the constant companion of the Son” (Ferguson, 1996, p. 37). Because of the Spirit’s work from conception, Jesus was free from transmission of sin through Mary (Luke 1:35; Heb 4:15) (Grudem, 2000). Likewise, fallen humanity needs the ministry of the Spirit in spiritual rebirth (John 3:8). Ferguson (1996) states that although there is not much information about Jesus’ early development, the Spirit continually worked in Jesus, and so it was possible that the twelve-year-old Jesus had remarkable and godly wisdom (Isa 11:2; 42:1; 61:1). Moreover, Jesus’ public life was empowered by the Spirit (Mark 1:10; Matt 4:1; 12:28; Luke 3:21; 11:13; Acts 10:38) And through that same Spirit he offered himself as an atoning sacrifice to God the Father (Heb 9:14) and rose from the dead (Rom 1:4; 1 Pet 3:18). Through his resurrection and ascension, Jesus, “the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit” (1 Cor 15:45). Ferguson (1996) states,

In effect, Paul is teaching that through his life and ministry Jesus came into such complete possession of the Spirit, receiving and experiencing him ‘without limit’ (John 3:34), that he is now ‘Lord’ of the Spirit (2 Cor 3:18). With respect to his economic ministry to us, the Spirit has been ‘imprinted’ with the character of Jesus. (p. 55)

Therefore, Jesus is not only characterized by humility but by the presence of the Spirit as

well, just as Isaiah had prophesized (Isa 53:2-3, 7; 11:2; 42:1; 61:1). So, the forgiveness Jesus offers to sinners is done in the Spirit with humility.

In the Bible, the Holy Spirit is described as God's power (Ferguson, 1996). In the OT, the Spirit's main role was to empower leaders, kings, priests, and prophets who were too weak to participate in God's great ministry. For example, when the Spirit of the Lord empowered pusillanimous Gideon, he became Israel's powerful leader (Judg 6:34). In the NT as well, the Holy Spirit is identified with the power of God that assists Christians in their weakness and suffering (Rom 8:26; 1 Cor 2:1-5; 1 Thess 1:5-6) (Ferguson, 1996; Fee, 1996). With the presence of the Spirit, Christians can have hope (Rom 15:13) and joy (1 Thess 1:5-6) even in the middle of affliction. For Paul, Christ is the very model who lived a life of weakness empowered by the Spirit (Fee, 1994, 1996).

For indeed He was crucified because of weakness, yet He lives because of the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, yet we will live with Him because of the power of God directed toward you. (2 Cor 13:4)

In this respect, the forgiveness Jesus offered was empowered through the power of the Holy Spirit. In the NT, Christian victims forgive their powerful offenders, because of the empowerment of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Likewise, for Christians today, forgiveness should be an action that originates from a character sanctified by the Spirit. This character reflects God, who graciously offers divine forgiveness (Exod 34:6-7).

### **Development of Divine Forgiveness in the NT**

#### **Atonement in the NT**

As mentioned in Chapter one, the atonement through Christ, as the first theocentric condition – the condition, which God himself had already fulfilled – is the foundation of divine forgiveness (Acts 2:22-38) (Gowan, 2010; Morris, 1984). Therefore, one has to first grasp Jesus' atonement in order to understand God's forgiveness as the prototype of human forgiveness. The Greek word for atonement (*ἱλασμός*), which is used three times in the NT (Rom 3:26; 1 John 2:2; 4:10), refers to the appeasement of God's

anger or cleansing a sinner from sins, or propitiation (BDAG). So, Christ's atonement is necessarily expiating and propitiatory. Jesus knew that his death was an atoning sacrifice and the apostles believed that Jesus was sent into the world as a ransom for sin, (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45), a sacrificial animal (John 17:19; cf. 1:29; Rom 3:25; 5:9; Eph 1:7; 2:13), and a substitute (John 15:13) for the forgiveness of sins (Erickson, 2013). The new covenant is established through the atoning death of Jesus (Matt 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor 11:24-25), which is an echo of the old covenant ritual described in Exodus 24:3-8 (Gowan, 2010). Because Jesus' atonement is the fulfillment of the atonement in the OT (Heb 9:24), it should be understood in that light. The following paragraphs will give an overview of atonement in the NT.

**Romans 5:6-11.** The best passage to understand God's forgiveness through Jesus' atonement is Romans 5:6-11, which is part of a broader section of Paul's teaching on salvation in Chapters 5-8. Paul describes diverse aspects of salvation that can be seen as a single package of benefits that believers receive on the basis of the Son's atonement: justification (5:1, 9), redemption (8:2, 23), reconciliation (5:1, 10), sanctification (Chapters 6-7), adoption (8:14-17), and glorification (8:18-30). Romans 5:6-11 is one of the clearest biblical passages about Jesus' once-for-all substitutionary death on the cross that purchased the salvation of his people. Paul emphasizes that Jesus has already accomplished a perfect atonement, which is the objective foundation of forgiveness, even before human offenders request forgiveness with repentance (Soderlund & Wright, 1999).

For while we were still powerless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation (Rom 5:6-11).

Paul uses the conjunction  $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$  (“for”) in verse six, which shows that this passage is connected with the previous verse where Paul affirms that we have hope because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5). Thus, this passage is an expansion on the objective foundation of the love of God in verse five (Schreiner, 1998). The first person plural used in verse one, denotes that Paul includes himself and his readers among those who have been justified by faith, have “peace with God” (5:1), and have been reconciled to him (5:11). Paul contrasts Jesus’ amazing love demonstrated by dying on behalf of believers with their unlovable status in verse six: at the time that Jesus accomplished his atoning work for the purpose of offering forgiveness to sinners, we, human beings, were powerless. Paul emphasizes the significance of the death of Jesus for undeserving, desperate humanity by repetition: “While we were still weak, Christ died for the ungodly” (v. 6); “While we still were sinners Christ died for us” (v. 8b); “While we were enemies, the death of Christ reconciled us to God (v. 10)” (Talbert, 2002, p. 142). Human beings, alienated from God, are described as weak, ungodly sinners and God’s enemies. Paul uses the adverb “still” ( $\acute{\epsilon}\tau\iota$ ) twice, in verses six and eight, to emphasize the fact that humans do not deserve God’s love expressed in Jesus’s atonement. Yet, Paul believes that it occurred at the right time ( $\kappa\alpha\iota\rho\acute{o}\varsigma$ ). For Paul, the  $\kappa\alpha\iota\rho\acute{o}\varsigma$  reflects God’s sovereign freedom in deciding the time and the way of salvation for sinners (Gal 4:4; Cranfield, 2001). Thus, Paul believes that Christ’s extraordinary work of atonement, needed to forgive the undeserving, is initiated at God’s appointed time and accomplished only by the sovereign God himself as a personal agent, apart from any act of the offender. Marshall (2002), similarly, states that, biblically, “forgiveness is dependent on the offer of God; He takes the initiative in providing it” (pp. 12-13). Volf (2006a), quoting Luther, states that, as divine giver, God’s love and forgiveness never depend on their object. Guthrie (1981) also comments on Paul’s perspective on justification, “His doctrine of justification has to do with God’s provision for the sinner, but he never suggests that man himself has no part in it. God’s

gift of righteousness needs only one response, i.e., to be received” (p. 589). Thus, divine forgiveness in the NT reflects the stance of the offended who initiates the process of forgiveness without regard to the meeting of any requirement on the part of the offender. In these repetitive statements about Jesus’ death for undeserving sinners, ‘ὕπὲρ’ (‘on behalf of’) is used four times and applied to persons and sinners (Rom 5:6, 8). Throughout the Pauline epistles, ‘ὕπὲρ’ is applied in similar contexts to sin and sinners, when referring to Jesus’ substitutionary, sacrificial death (1 Thess 5:10; 2 Cor 5: 14-15, 21; Gal 1:4, 3:13; 1 Cor 15:3) (Hill & James III, 2004; Schreiner, 1998; Hultgren, 2011). Therefore, in divine forgiveness, sinners or offenders should always be regarded as its recipients.

The extraordinary nature of God’s love through Christ’s vicarious death on behalf of sinners is emphasized again through the parenthetical remark in verse seven (Hultgren, 2011); Christ’s ethic expressed in his death for the undeserving sharply contrasts with that of common humanity. At most, the greatest human ethic “conceivably could lead him to surrender his life for a good person or perhaps a good cause” (Soderlund and Wright, 1999, p. 40). In other words, a human being’s benevolence is usually conditional because of the natural human tendency of reciprocity (Rom 5:7; cf. Matt 5:44-47) (Carson, 2002; Volf, 2006a). Talbert (2002) points out that Christ’s death for the undeserving is very different from the ancient Jewish value of “granting benefits only to the deserving” (p. 137). For instance, Sirach 12:1-7 teaches: “If you do good, know to whom you do it... Give to the godly man but do not help the sinner.” As a result, “the picture of a seeking, caring, and forgiving God who meets sinners before they repent is one that has no parallel in Second Temple Judaism” (Soderlund and Wright, 1999, p. 45). As a result, divine forgiveness and love expressed through the death of Christ exceeds natural human capacities, and was even considered radical in relation to the Jewish perspective of Jesus’ time. Therefore, to reflect God’s forgiveness, Christians have to reject their natural tendency toward conditional love and forgiveness.



Verse eight gives us the answer as to why God planned Jesus to die at a time when those he died for were still ungodly (v. 6) and weak sinners (v. 6, 8), or, in other words, when they were still God's enemies (v. 10) –these are all terms that depict “the state of human beings before justification”; the answer is that the extraordinary death of Christ demonstrates God's love toward us (Schreiner, 1998, p. 260). For Paul, Christ's death for the unlovely is a powerful revelation of God's radical love. Thus, God's love is the primary motive of his forgiveness. The Apostle John also highlights God's love as the motive of Jesus' self-sacrificial, atoning work: “He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10; cf. John 3:16). John Murray (1999) asserts that “the atonement is the provision of God's love” (p. 2). Because God's forgiveness was unilaterally initiated in love, it reflects the superabundant character of his love. Paul describes in Colossian 1:14-22 that God through Christ is the sovereign creator not only of all creation but also is the source of the atonement; thus “God, as always, is the acting subject, through Christ” (Purves, 2015, p. 15).

In verse eight, Paul uses the indicative verb ‘demonstrate’ (“*συνίστημι*”) in the present tense, which denotes an imperfective aspect as referring to continuing action (Wallace, 1997; Campbell, 2008; Köstenberger, Merkle, & Plummer, 2016). Campbell (2008) states,

The present and imperfect tense-forms encode imperfective aspect at the semantic level. Imperfective aspect views an action or state from the inside; it is the internal viewpoint. Using the illustration of the reporter and the street parade, the internal viewpoint is the view from the street, with the parade unfolding in full view. Unlike the view from afar (in the helicopter = perfective aspect), the reporter on the street does not view the beginning or end of the parade, but has a view of the details. (p. 60)

Thus, with the verb ‘demonstrate’ Paul seems to emphasize that the historical event of the cross continues to demonstrate God's amazing love here and now (Cranfield, 2001; Soderlund & Wright, 1999). Because God's great love, demonstrated by Jesus' atoning death, is the same love which has been poured out within Christians' hearts by the Spirit (v. 5), Christian hope has a strong grounding (Schreiner, 1998).

In verse nine, Paul emphasizes with an aorist participle, δικαιωθέντες, that now (νῦν) believers have already been justified by Jesus' blood. The means of justification is the blood (ἐν τῷ αἵμα), which Paul uses intentionally to describe Jesus' death as a sacrifice for atoning sin (cf. Rom 3: 24-36) (Soderlund & Wright, 1999). According to God, "it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement." (Lev 17:11). Marshall (2007) points out that Paul tends to use the language of justification in his early writing, such as Romans (Rom 3:24; 5:9), instead of forgiveness which is, for Paul, very similar in meaning. In fact, forgiveness of sin is an aspect of justification, because justification is God's legal act of regarding our sin and guilt as forgiven and declaring us to be righteous through Christ's atonement (Grudem, 2000). Some have said that justification, meaning 'to declare righteous,' can mean almost the same thing as forgiveness; just the concept of justification appears to be wider than that of forgiveness (Bash, 2015; Hägerland (2011). Paul connects the blood of Jesus with the forgiveness of sins in his other epistles (Eph 1:7; Col 1:14). Other NT writers also link the blood of Jesus to the forgiveness of sins (Matt 26:28; Heb 9:22; 1 Pet 1:18-19; Rev 1:5; 7:14).

The second clause of verse nine shows that divine forgiveness through Jesus' death implies the propitiation of divine wrath. God's wrath (ὀργή) denotes God's indignation, punishment, or judgment against human sin in the NT (BDAG). In the epistle to the Romans, God's wrath (ὀργή) appears in other verses (1:18, 2:5, 2:8, 3:5, and 4:15) where it is used to describe God's emotional response toward unforgiven or disobedient sinners. The NT shows clearly that God's wrath needs to be appeased (Rom 1:18; 2:5, 3:25-26; 8; 4:15; 9:22; Eph 2:3; 5:6; Col 3:6; 1 Thess 1:10; 2:16; 5:9) (Erikson, 2013; Morris, 1984). According to Paul, although believers have already been justified, they will still be saved from God's wrath in the future. Using the future tense, Paul is referring to the final judgment when God's wrath will be poured out on all who reject Christ (Rom 2:5; 2:8) (Stott, 2001). Thus, God's wrath reflects divine justice. Conversely, the propitiation of God's wrath reflects the fact that Jesus' atonement fulfills

God's justice, since Jesus' death served as "a sacrifice that bears God's wrath to the end and, in so doing, changes God's wrath toward us into favor" (Grudem, 2000, p. 575). This passage demonstrates that divine forgiveness does not exclude or disregard justice, but rather satisfies justice fully. Therefore, the cross of Jesus is the place of not only the love but also the justice of God.

Verse ten makes clear that the sacrificial death of the Son (*θανάτου τοῦ υἱοῦ*) brought reconciliation with God to those who were alienated from God and God's enemies (*ἐχθροί*); this implies that there was enmity (*ἐχθρα*) between God and humanity (cf. Rom 8:7). Paul emphasizes again that God, as the offended party, "initiates and unilaterally completes reconciliation" (*NIDB*, vol. 4, p. 746). Hultgren (2011) points out the symmetry between verses 9 and 10 as follows (p. 213):

Verse 9	Verse 10
Much more	Much more
having been justified	having been reconciled
by his blood	through the death of his Son
we shall be saved.	we shall be saved

The parallel structure, "by his blood" in verse nine and "through the death of the Son" in verse ten, denotes that Jesus' vicarious atonement for human sins is the means of both justification and reconciliation. As a result, this parallelism shows that reconciliation and justification are just different aspects of the salvation that Christians obtain through faith in Christ's atoning death (Talbert, 2002; Schreiner, 1998). The difference between justification and reconciliation is that justification emphasizes the forensic aspect of salvation, but reconciliation stresses the relational aspect of salvation (Moo, 1996). In fact, "the atoning work of Christ is a complex event that has several effects on us" (Grudem, 2000, p. 579). When believers accept through faith and repentance that Jesus' death atoned for sin once and for all, they receive, at once, every blessing of salvation including justification, forgiveness, adoption, reconciliation, and glorification.

Thus, there are two moments that are important in one's salvation: the moment

that Jesus' atoning death accomplished salvation and the moment of salvation's appropriation through personal acceptance by faith. For example, in 2 Corinthians 5:19-20, Paul describes how these two aspects come together in the idea of reconciliation.

Reconciliation in Paul has two aspects, or moments: the accomplishment of reconciliation through Christ on the cross (cf. 2 Cor 5:19: "in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself"); and the acceptance of that completed work by the believer (cf. 2 Cor 5:20b: "We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God"). (Moo, 1996, p. 311)

In fact, the word, 'reconcile' (*καταλλάσσω*; Rom 5:10; 1 Cor 7:11; 2 Cor 5:18-20; *ἀποκαταλλάσσω*; Eph 2:16; Col 1:20, 22) and 'reconciliation' (*καταλλαγή*; Rom 5:11; 11:15; 2 Cor 5:18-19) always denote mutuality or cooperation of two parties in the age of the NT writers (Hultgren, 2011; Constantineanu, 2010; Taylor, 1941; Morris, 1984). Throughout the Bible, the word "reconciliation" conveys not only the elimination of enmity with God, but also the establishment of friendship (Constantineanu, 2010; Moo, 1996; *NIDB*, vol. 4). Thus, although reconciliation is similar to forgiveness or justification, it is differentiated from forgiveness by the fact that forgiveness is not mutual, but a unilateral decision of the offended party as a personal agent. When Jesus' atonement is applied to the believer, reconciliation takes place after divine forgiveness is received through faith and repentance by sinners. For example, in 2 Corinthians 5:19, "reconciliation can take place only when people's sins are not reckoned against them" through forgiveness (Marshall, 2007, p. 116). Thus, although reconciliation is the concomitant of justification and forgiveness on the basis of Jesus' atonement, strictly speaking, it is a result of forgiveness (Soderlund & Wright, 1999; Morris, 1984). Romans 5:1 clearly affirms that the result of justification is peace with God (Schreiner, 1998). "Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:1). For Paul, peace, as the opposite of enmity, is a distinctive feature of reconciliation (Eph 2:14; Col 1:20-22; Phil 4:7) (Ridderbos, 1978; Soderlund & Wright, 1999; Morris, 1984), if not even equivalent to it (Taylor, 1941; Constantineanu, 2010; Morris, 1984). Constantineanu (2010) says this about Romans 5:1:

The close association between righteousness and peace which Paul makes here is not a novel thing. We find in various places in the OT this combination, particularly as an eschatological characteristic of the age to come. Isaiah 32.17, for example, describes this as follows: 'The effect of righteousness will be peace. (p. 125)

Men are reconciled with God when God sees them as righteous because their sins have been forgiven. Thus, divine forgiveness is not the ultimate goal; rather, the goal is reconciliation, the restoration of the broken relationship. This reconciliation is completed with God's offer of forgiveness and a sinner's acceptance of it through repentance and faith. In other words, at the moment of repentance, the sinner receives God's forgiveness and is reconciled with God. So, reconciliation consists of forgiveness and repentance. In the second clause of verse ten, Paul intensifies his conclusion: "much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." Here "his life," which is the opposite of the "Son's death," denotes Christ's resurrection. "If Christ's death means God made peace with us even though we were his enemies, surely Christ's resurrection means God will save us now that we are friends" (Achtmeier, 1986, p. 91). Verse eleven shows that believers need only to receive with gratefulness the reconciliation which has already been accomplished by Jesus' atonement (Soderlund & Wright, 1999). What God has done for Christians through Christ is the unshakable foundation of their boasting in God with confidence, joy and hope. As a result, Romans 5:6-11 describes Christ's atonement as the foundation of our salvation. However, this objective atonement can be experienced subjectively only by receiving the gospel (Rom 10:14; Acts 2:38).

Having established an understanding of atonement in the NT on the basis of Romans 5:6-11, we now turn to explore some additional characteristics of atonement in the NT by considering the continuity and discontinuity of atonement in the OT and the NT.

**Continuity and discontinuity of atonement in the OT and the NT.** First of all, there is continuity between atonement in the OT and the NT.

First, in both the OT and NT, atonement originates from a sovereign God who

demonstrates gracious love to sinners (Gen 3:21; Lev 17:11; 16:22; 4:1-35; Rom 3:24; 5:8, 15; Eph 1:7; 2:8-9; 5:2). Though OT atonement has a conditional character, as discussed in Chapter two, it also originates from God's love or grace. As Sklar (2012) states,

Atonement for sin is rooted in the gracious activity of the Lord, who provides the means by which atonement can be made. Atoning sacrifices were indeed something the Israelites gave to the Lord, but they could only do so because of his initial grace in granting sacrifice as a means of atonement. (p. 471)

We have already examined that Jesus' motive for the atonement is God's divine love for sinners: "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). Because sinners are enemies of God (Rom 5:10) and undeserving, Jesus' atonement is also described as gracious: "in Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace" (Eph 1:7). The loving and gracious nature of God is the only ground for and source of God's sovereign and divine forgiveness.

Second, both the OT atonement through animal sacrifices and Jesus' atonement reveal God's justice. In both cases God's justice requires sinners to make a payment for their sins. In the OT, "the result of atonement, was always to prevent or arrest the wrath of God from flaming out" and thus satisfying God's justice (Hill & James III, 2004, p. 65). In the NT, too, "God's holiness requires that there be atonement if the condemned condition of sinners is to be overcome" (Erickson, 2013, p. 826). The book of Romans describes Jesus' propitiatory atonement satisfying God's demand for justice and holiness (Rom 3:25; 5:9). Thus, the atonement in both Testaments shows that biblical forgiveness has to address divine justice (Belousek, 2011; Bash, 2007). Therefore, strictly speaking, the grace of God's forgiveness is not "cheap grace" but "a judgment of grace that requires and enables our repentance" on the basis of justice (Jones, 1995, p. 136). In forgiveness, God does not overlook the sin or condone the guilt (Glasscock, 2009). In fact, "it is the cross that shows God to be righteous in the very act of forgiveness"

(Morris, 1984, p. 195).

On the other hand, there is discontinuity too.

First, atonement in the NT is different from that in the OT in the subject of its provision and the order. Unlike in the OT, where the sinner himself was to provide the atoning sacrifice as a repenting gesture, the sacrifice for atonement in the NT is provided by the offended God himself. Also, in the OT, repentance as precondition comes prior to atonement and forgiveness. However, in the NT atonement for divine forgiveness is accomplished and offered before the sinner's repentance (Rom 5:6-11) and repentance is, thus, no longer a precondition to the offering of divine forgiveness. Sklar (2012) argues,

The Lord's gracious action is of course amplified once we get to the NT, for in the OT the Israelites still provided their own sacrifice, whereas in the NT it is the Lord himself who does so: "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us!" (Rom 5:8). (p. 471)

As Sklar points out, Christ's atonement ensures that sinners do not need to contribute anything for the atonement of their sins. Thus atonement in the NT reveals God's grace or love as the cause of God's forgiveness much more clearly than in the OT. Fluhner (2010) explains that the atonement is all God's work:

We are redeemed by Jesus and justified by the Father. We do not have anything to offer to this formula. Salvation is by grace and by grace alone, received through the channel of faith, but nevertheless, all of God. God alone is the Savior. We do not save ourselves (p. 34).

Second, the atonement through Jesus Christ for divine forgiveness is unique in terms of the nature of the sacrificial offering; it is not an animal, but the second person of the Trinity, Jesus the God-man. Furthermore, Christ is both the high priest who offers the sacrifice to God and the sacrificial victim himself (Heb 2:17; 7:27; 9:11-14) (Hill & James III, 2004). In other words, the two different functions, those of priest and sacrificial animal, become one in Christ (Erickson, 2013).

Third, Christ's atonement is distinguishable also in its effect. Jesus' sacrifice is once-for-all as compared with the OT form of atonement, which is limited, repetitive, and imperfect (Heb 9-10). The sacrifice of animals in the OT was not designed to remove sin

forever and, thus, people were reminded of their sins every year (Heb10:1-7) (Thompson, 2008). Only Jesus Christ's atonement can remove, perfectly and forever, the effects of the fall, such as guilt, condemnation, and broken relationships (Erickson, 2013). This is a remarkable development of atonement in the NT as compared to that in the OT.

A last unique aspect of divine forgiveness in the NT is that it results in inward transformation of the recipient's heart, unlike OT forgiveness, where its effect is mainly concerned with outward results, such as salvation from punishment. Under the new covenant, God's law will be ingrained again in the hearts of those who are forgiven by God, so that they can obey God (Jer 31:31-34).

### **Development of the Concept of Sin**

The concept of sin in the OT seems to emphasize outward behavior, even though one's inner motives are certainly important as well (Deut 10:16; 30:6; Lev 26:41; Jer 4:4; Prov 4:23). For example, in the case of the Decalogue, all commandments except one ("Thou shalt not covet") refer to actions and not to inner motives (Kaiser, 1991). Thus, in the OT, holiness was understood as outward "separation from everything that is common or mundane" (Mannoia & Thorsen, 2008, p. 32). This separation is visible throughout the OT in aspects such as time, space, and people. God sanctifies time by setting apart a day of rest (Gen 2:3) and then he separates a garden from the rest of creation (Gen 2:8). Later, God distinguishes Israel as his holy people from other nations (Exod 19:6), which is reinforced by separating times, such as the Sabbath, special festivals, and holy areas of importance, such as the holy of holies in the tabernacle. This outward tradition of holiness continued until first century Jewish society. For instance, according to Sanders (1985), the most important and common Jewish laws at the time of Jesus were those related to food. This external holiness tendency is also noticeable in the OT and Judaic concept of divine forgiveness where it is not so much internal or psychological, as it is outward-focused, involving, for example, confession, restitution,



atonement, and proclamation of forgiveness.

Another aspect of sin in the OT is that it was often understood to be communal rather than individual. Thus, an individual's sin, such as Achan's (Josh 7:24) or Abimelech's (Gen 20:18), affected not only the sinner but the community he was part of. For example, Achan's sin was the cause of Israel's defeat in the war against Ai. The OT focus on outward behavior and communal effects of holiness and sin are transformed by Jesus and the NT writers to include a greater focus on one's internal motives and individual responsibility. It is thus that sin can be seen as 'indwelling' (Rom 7:17, 20).

Furthermore, the NT extends the concept of sin from a focus mainly on Israel to all of humanity (Rom 3:9), present in every human heart and threatening to exercise dominion over all individuals (Owen, 1966b). For example, Jesus is not interested in a person's ability to outwardly keep food laws, he is interested in the person's inner self, his heart (Matt 5:8, 28; 15:18-20; Mark 7:21-23). Jesus understood the seriousness of human depravity and the domineering power of indwelling sin: "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin" (John 8:34). Jesus said this to Jewish people who believed that they were free, because they considered themselves God's children (John 8:33); they thought they could secure God's forgiveness through atoning activities, such as rituals or good deeds. This demonstrates that Jesus' concept of sin is different from that in the OT or the Jewish tradition.

In the NT, Paul highlights the universality of sin: "both Jews and Greeks are all under sin" (Rom 3:9). For Paul, sin is a practical, dynamic, and living spiritual principle, which has dominion over humanity (Owen, 1966b; 1965). There is a divide between human beings on the basis of whether they are under grace or under sin (Rom 3:9; 6:14). Paul and other NT authors also recognize the importance of one's internal motives with regard to sin and holiness (1 Cor 3:16; 1 Pet 1:22; Jas 4:8) (Mannoia & Thorsen, 2008). People are slaves of the one they obey, and they can belong to sin or to obedience (Rom 6:16). Although believers are free from the dominion of sin and their guilt is removed by

justification, sin still fights to have dominion. Indwelling sin in a believer loses its dominion and is mortally weakened through regeneration, but its nature to pursue dominion is not changed (Owen, 1965, 1966b). Thus, unlike in the OT, where the Israelites had to fight against other nations and idolatrous practices, God's people in the NT have their most powerful enemy not outside but inside of themselves.

The NT focus on universality and inwardness impacts NT ethics of fighting against indwelling sin. For instance, Jesus regards adultery not only as outward behavioral sin, but includes lustful thoughts or the imaginations of one's heart in this concept (Matt 5:28). Christians are required to love and forgive their enemies from the heart (Matt 18:35; Rom 12:14-21; 1 Pet 3:9). The universal and inward development of the concept of sin in the NT implies that the concepts of atonement and divine forgiveness also follow that same pattern (McKnight, 2007; Morris, 1984).

Furthermore, the domineering power of indwelling sin over humanity also suggests humanity's inability to overcome it (Rom 3:23; 6:17). In other words, humans can never secure divine forgiveness on the basis of their own actions and are always dependent on the grace of God only (Rom 3:20-26; 6:14; 8:1-11). In that respect, Gowan (2010) states,

Sin can now be thought of as a master to which one can become enslaved. Personal responsibility is certainly still involved, but the likelihood of being able to restore what had been destroyed through sin by one's own efforts is diminished when one is called a slave of sin. Only a greater power can change that, and it is God's overwhelming power that scripture celebrates. (p. 135)

Thus, the only solution to indwelling sin is God's offer of forgiveness with divine power to transform sinfulness in the human heart. These gifts are unconditionally prepared and offered on the basis of a gracious decision by the sovereign forgiver.

### **The Model of Divine Forgiveness**

We already concluded that there are two conditions in securing divine forgiveness; these are based on the role of the offended and the offender. The first

condition is Jesus' atonement, which is prepared and offered universally to every sinner through God's initiating love. The second is the sinner's repentance through which God's forgiveness is applied and granted to the sinner. Thus, the NT model of divine forgiveness includes both God's unconditional pre-offer of forgiveness and the sinner's conditional reception of forgiveness based on faith and repentance. Nelson (2012) classifies this divine forgiveness as "salvific", because it brings justification to believers (p. 33). Through salvific or "judicial" divine forgiveness (Adams, 1989, p. 45) sinners become God's children and are forgiven all their sins in the past, present, and future on the foundation of Christ's sacrifice by grace alone (Eph 1:7; Col 1:14; 2:13; 1 John 2:12; Rom 8:1). In other words, the believer's whole life is covered under the once-for-all effects of salvific divine forgiveness. This salvific nature could be considered the first aspect of divine forgiveness and could be termed primary divine forgiveness

The second aspect has to do with the reality of indwelling sin, which, as was described above, has lost its dominion but retains some of its force, causing people to daily commit actual sins (Owen, 1965, 1966b). Secondary divine forgiveness is needed for these actual sins and could be called "sanctifying forgiveness" (Nelson, 2012, p. 33). The apostle John says that "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). In this passage where John exhorts Christians who have communion with God to walk in the light, "we" refers to believers (Glasscock, 2009). So this ongoing divine forgiveness is limited to Christians only for the purpose of cleansing or holiness. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught Christians to pray for forgiveness of sins that were committed daily, just as they pray for their daily bread: "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt 6:12). Grudem (2000) explains the need to pray daily for the sins committed as the result of remaining indwelling sin:

This daily prayer for forgiveness of sins is not a prayer that God would give us justification again and again throughout our lives, for justification is a one-time event that occurs immediately after we trust in Christ with saving faith. Rather the

prayer for forgiveness of sins each day is a prayer that God's fatherly relationship with us, which has been disrupted by sin that displeased him, be restored, and that he relate to us once again as a Father who delights in his children whom he loves. (p. 740)

MacArthur (2009) states this daily forgiveness is “a parental forgiveness God grants as our Father” (p. 58). Secondary divine forgiveness is concerned with confirming and personally appropriating the forgiveness, rather than the actual forgiveness itself, since all sins were already included in the forgiveness that was granted at the moment of justifying divine forgiveness. This must be so (Rom 8:1), for Christians cannot possibly recognize all their sins because of human depravity (Eph 4:18) and might fail to repent of sins they should repent of (Beach, 2015). Secondary forgiveness, thus, is needed for sins recognized consciously and serves the purpose of removing barriers in the believer's relationship with God. This secondary divine forgiveness is not once-for-all, but repetitive; not justifying, but restoring; not universally offered to everybody, but limited, only to Christians. According to 1 John 1:9, the conjunction *ἐάν* (“if”) makes this daily divine forgiveness a form of repentance-conditional forgiveness: ‘if we confess our sins, he will forgive and cleanse us.’ Confession or repentance precedes the forgiveness. In 1 John 1:9, “to confess” (*ὁμολογέω*) etymologically means “to say the same thing,” and it implies that one recognizes the truthfulness of God's testimony about sinfulness in contrast to denying it—implying that a person acknowledges or says the same as God says” (Glasscock, 2009, p. 225). Vice versa, if we deny God's judgment of our sins, we lie (vv. 8, 10). Thus, the foundation of repentance is the sinner's agreement with God's truthful view of his or her sin. In this respect, Beeke (2006) states,

Confession of sins makes us see ourselves in light of the living God and his holy law. We stop comparing ourselves to others. We stop commending ourselves. We stop excusing ourselves, or blaming others. Instead, we confess that we are sinners and deserve to be punished. (p. 46)

For the early Christians, this confession was often a verbal declaration to one another (Jas 5:16) and included behaviorally stopping the sin (Smalley, 2009; Glasscock, 2009). By grace Christians can use their actual sins as opportunities to grow in holiness by

exposing, rather than concealing the sin; repenting of it; and engaging in mortification (Rom 8:13). This secondary type of forgiveness only exists by virtue of, as well as confirms, primary divine forgiveness.

Secondary divine forgiveness is also available on the same foundation of Jesus' atoning death: "but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Smalley (2009) argues that the verb *καθαρίζει* ("purifies") in verse 7 is "a continuous present," which means that our sin is being removed "effectively and repeatedly" in Christ's atonement (p. 23). The argument that confession is the only condition of forgiveness in 1 John 1:5-10 has no textual basis according to Smalley; "moreover, the reference to the 'blood of Jesus' is a logical and indispensable step in John's argument at this point and consistent with the other sacrificial references to the death of Jesus in 1 John (cf. 2:2; 4:10) and even in John's Gospel" (2009, p. 24). Christians are always in need of primary and secondary forgiveness which depend on Jesus' atonement, and which God offers unilaterally before the sinner's actual repentance (Jobes, 2014).

Although this secondary divine forgiveness is granted conditionally only to Christians who confess their sins, according to 1 John 1:9, forgiveness does not depend on the confession itself, but on God whose character is "faithful and righteous" (1 John 1:9) (Smalley, 2009; Glasscock, 2009). In 1 John 1:9, *ἵνα* ("so that"), which denotes result, is connected with the two adjectives "faithful and righteous," signifying that God's forgiving and cleansing is the result of God's faithfulness and righteousness and not of the confession itself (Smalley, 2009). Strictly speaking, our repentance of sins is founded on the pre-offered promise of God who is faithful and just to forgive his children's actual sins on the basis of Jesus' atoning death. God "is righteous in doing so because compensation for the offense against God has already been fully paid through Christ's shed blood. God is not ignoring sin or excusing the sinner" (Glasscock, 2009, p. 225). As

a result, like primary justifying divine forgiveness, secondary sanctifying divine forgiveness is presented as an unconditional pre-offer of forgiveness in conjunction with conditional post-attainment of forgiveness after repentance.

### **The Condition of Receiving Divine Forgiveness: Repentance and Faith**

Although the essence of NT divine forgiveness is its unilateral character, some things need to be present in order for sinful human beings to secure it; namely, faith and repentance. In contrast with the OT, repentance is not a prerequisite, yet repentance and faith in Christ remain necessary for Christians to receive God's forgiveness. Jesus' first public words call for both repentance and faith: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). This was not new as John the Baptist also emphasized the indispensable need of repentance for forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). Jesus added faith as a necessary component to enter the kingdom of God (Mark 1:15; Luke 17:19; cf. Matt 4:17; Luke 5:32). Ferguson (1996) explains the relation between faith and repentance:

By faith alone Christ is received and rested on as Savior. Justification is by faith (alone!), not by repentance. But repentance is as necessary to salvation by faith as the ankle is essential to planting the foot on the ground, or as the beating heart is to the use of the eye for vision. Both are essential, but they are not related to the same act in the same way. Faith is the individual trusting in Christ; repentance is the same individual quitting sin. Neither can exist apart from the other. (p. 124)

Thus, faith and repentance necessarily go together in the process of the sinner's conversion; faith is repenting faith and repentance is believing repentance. In the NT, faith and repentance are only possible through the Spirit's initiating grace (John 3:6-9) (Owen, 1966a; Beach, 2015). Thus, the basis of forgiveness is always God's grace alone.

As we have already examined, even in the OT where repentance was a prerequisite, divine forgiveness is about God's just and forgiving character (Exod 34:7); it does not depend on the sinner, but on God's sovereign decision. Human repentance and faith, therefore, are never a causative condition in God's forgiveness. In this respect,

Balthasar (1984) states that “God forgives through free grace and not on the basis of acts of penance, but . . . this forgiveness cannot become effective unless there is an expiatory conversion of the person” (p. 322). Thus, rather than being causative, repentance is a receptive condition of God’s forgiveness (Beach, 2015). Jesus’ emphasis on the need of faith and repentance in receiving divine forgiveness is consistently preached by his apostles (cf. Acts 11:18; 3:18-19; 4:12; 5:31; 13:38-39; 20:21; Rom 1:17; 3:22; 4:5). As in the OT, repentance continues to be an indispensable condition of securing divine forgiveness. According to Jesus, this condition applies not only to the sinner, but to the (self-)righteous as well; it applies to both the tax collector and the Pharisee (Luke 18:9-14). The reason is that everyone fails “to live the life of discipleship as described in the Sermon on the Mount” (Volf, 1996, p. 115). Those who know themselves to be sinners become justified children of God, like the tax collector (Luke 18) and the sinful woman who repented (Luke 7). On the contrary, those who believe themselves to be righteous first have to recognize their identity as sinners in need of repentance before they can receive a new identity and become a new creation, as in the example of the self-righteous Pharisees (Luke 7:39; 18:11-12, 14).

### **Universal Reconciliation**

As mentioned, forgiveness is not an end in and of itself; its goal is reconciliation. There is no word in the Hebrew language that exactly means reconciliation and there are only a few instances that point to this concept. Yet, it must be a critical topic in OT history because of its relational character flowing from Israel’s covenants with God (*NIDB*, vol. 4). As we have seen, whenever the Israelites committed sin against God, they had to engage in an atoning ritual for forgiveness and reconciliation with God. Thus, reconciliation in the OT was initiated by sinful Israel and limited almost exclusively to the relationship between Israel and God. In the NT, however God becomes the initiator of forgiveness and reconciliation by offering his Son as the atoning sacrifice

(2 Cor 5:18; Rom 3:25; 5:8-11; 1 John 2:2). Ridderbos (1997) states that “when we look more closely at these pronouncements relating to reconciliation, it can be ascertained that this reconciliation is qualified above all by the fact that God is its Author and Initiator” (p. 182).

Furthermore, the scope of reconciliation in the NT becomes increasingly universal by including other nations, even the entire universe, in addition to sinful Israelites (Eph 2:12-17; Col 1:20-22; 2 Cor 5:18-21): “It was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven” (Col 1:19-20). Thus, this universal reconciliation is possible only because of the atonement of Jesus Christ, who seeks to restore the relationship he is supposed to have with all he created (Col 1:15-20). However, the reconciliation is universal in scope, not in actuality, since not all humans believe in Christ. Consequently, human forgiveness too needs to be regarded in light of the universal scope of this reconciliation as well, since it is also founded on Jesus’ atonement. Melick (1991) points out that in the context of Colossians 1:20 reconciliation can be defined “as all things being put into proper relation to Christ” (p. 227). The reconciliation Jesus accomplished through atonement is at first only objective. Subjective reconciliation happens when sinful humans receive the gospel through repentance and faith. Neufeld (2011) states that Jesus’ whole life was about reconciliation:

Indeed, Jesus’ whole life, teaching, healing, announcing and enacting of the reign of God, resurrection and *parousia* are all part of the drama of ‘at-one-ment’ that began at the first sin and will culminate with the final mending of the broken cosmos. (p. 85)

The purpose of Jesus’ atonement is to reconcile all of his creation through, in, and by him, so that peace and restoration can replace the broken relationship that exists between God and individual humans.



## **Change in the Object of Divine Forgiveness**

Whereas in the OT God's forgiveness was limited to the Israelites, with a few exceptions that hint at this coming universal change, such as the story of Jonah and Nineveh, in the NT Jesus inaugurates a new era where anyone can become the object of divine forgiveness (Wright, 1997). According to Luke 4:16-30, at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus quotes Isaiah 61:1-3. The Jews, at that time, believed that this passage talked about a Jewish messianic figure who would save the nation by forgiving the Jews in exile, and retaliating on their gentile enemies (Evans, 1992). When Jesus, however, quotes Isaiah 61:1-3, he "omitted reference to the vengeance of which Isaiah spoke and extended forgiveness to all – to Israel and, by implication, to Israel's enemies" (Evans, 1992, p. 133). Subsequently, in Luke 4:25-27, Jesus includes Gentiles as the recipients of God's blessings. The NT shows that the early church, which had carried on the Jewish belief that there would be no forgiveness outside Israel, also began to develop a new concept of divine forgiveness proclaiming "that *everyone* who believes in [Jesus] receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10:43, emphasis added). Jesus declared that he had come into this world not for the righteous, but for sinners, the weak, and tax collectors; they are the ones qualified to be objects of divine forgiveness (Luke 5:32; John 9:24). After initial hesitations, the early Christians accepted and rejoiced in the fact that gentiles, too, could be granted repentance and forgiveness (Acts 11:18; 15:19; Eph 3:6).

## **The Church as God's Forgiving and Reconciling Community**

In the NT, the church is described as God's main agent in mediating forgiveness and reconciliation (Matt 16:18-19; 18:15-22; John 20:22-23; 1 Cor 5:4-5; 2 Cor 2:6-11; 5:18-20; Eph 2:12-22; Col 1:20) (Klassen, 1966; Gruchy, 2002). This is a logical consequence of the church's identity as the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27; Col 1:18; Eph 1:22-23), since Jesus is the embodiment of forgiveness and reconciliation (Col 1:20;

Gal 3:28). Jesus gave the church authority to discipline members: “Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven” (Matt 18:18). Jesus had spoken these same words to Peter in Matthew 16:19. These two passages are echoed in John 20:23 where the expression of bind and loose is substituted with retain and forgive (Colijn, 2010, p. 162). “If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained” (John 20:23).

The resurrected Jesus spoke these words to the disciples with the commandment of “receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22). Thus, the church’s ministry of forgiveness continues to be founded on the Holy Spirit (Jones, 1995). This implies that the church is a “pneumadynamic” community, which is birthed and shaped by the Spirit on the basis of faith in Christ Jesus (Allison, 2012, p. 117). The church’s forgiveness and reconciliatory activity is in line with divine activity (Turner, 2008; Hagner, 1995).

Glasscock (2009) says the following about John 20:23:

The perfect tense, passive voice verb “have been forgiven” (*ἀφέωνται*) indicates a condition that was accomplished in the past with the results still remaining. Thus the most probable interpretation of this text is that the apostles were proclaiming what had already been accomplished; they were not removing sin by their pronouncement. In other words the apostles were spokesmen for heaven, declaring what had already been determined by divine decree. (p. 223)

The church’s role here could be seen as an echo of the OT priest who declares divine forgiveness to sinners (Best, 1985). The promise to the church to have authority to bind or loose (Matt 18:18-20) is granted with the words that “Jesus Christ is in their midst (v. 20)” (Klassen, 1966, p. 145). Church discipline, concerned with granting or withholding divine forgiveness, should be done, therefore, in the awareness of the presence of the Spirit of Christ. It implies that without the Spirit, the church cannot be identified as a genuine Christian community. Furthermore, the authority to forgive is delegated, meaning that the church, as a community of fallible humans, can make a wrong decision about the discipline of members. Church discipline, therefore, is a fallible sign of the

infallible divine judgment to come (2 Cor 5:10) and its purpose is always restoration of sinful believers through repentance (Allison, 2012; Grudem, 2000).

## **Human Forgiveness in the NT**

### **Explicit Emphasis on Human Forgiveness**

One of the most remarkable changes in the development of biblical forgiveness is the explicit emphasis on human forgiveness in the NT (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13; Luke 17:3-4; Matt 6:12, 14-15; 18:15-17; Mark 11:25; Luke 11:4). Owen (1966b) says the following about this development:

This duty is more directly and expressly required in the New Testament than in the Old. Required then it was, but not so openly, so plainly, so expressly as now. Hence we find a different frame of spirit between them under that dispensation and those under that of the New Testament. . . . So Zechariah, when he died, cried, “the Lord look upon, and require it;” but Stephen, dying in the same cause and manner, said, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” Elijah called for fire from heaven; but our Saviour reproves the least inclination in his disciples to imitate him therein. And the reason of this difference is, because forgiveness in God is under the New Testament far more clearly (especially in the nature and cause of it) discovered in the gospel, which hath brought life and immortality to light, than it was under the law. (p. 496)

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the main focus of the OT was the offender’s indispensable duty and responsibility to repent to both the human and divine offended parties for receiving God’s forgiveness. In the OT one cannot find explicit teachings on how human victims are to forgive their offenders. There are only some narratives about human forgiveness, but even in those narratives the offenders’ repentance is much more emphasized than the victims’ forgiveness; those offenders were often in a desperate situation and without reconciliation with their victims they might die. These stories are not so much about the victim as they are about the offenders’ repentance and their subsequent reconciliation. Furthermore, whereas offenders in the OT needed to be proactive in securing divine or human forgiveness, the victims were reactive rather than active. In the NT era, in contrast, human forgiveness becomes “the identity markers of his disciples” and “central to Christian faith and *praxis*” [emphasis in original], although “forgiveness is not an innovation of Christianity” (Bash, 2007, p. 26).

## **Godlike Human Forgiveness: Unilateral Forgiveness**

Unlike the OT, the NT explains clearly how God's children should forgive their offenders: "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" (Eph 4:32) and "bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you" (Col 3:13). In this verse, *καθὼς* ("just as") is used with *καί* ("also") for emphasis of the strong analogy between divine and human forgiveness. So Spurgeon (1973) states that "the imitation should be as exact as possible" (p. 283). As we mentioned in Chapter one, those who believe that God's forgiveness is conditional, being granted on the condition of repentance, regard human forgiveness to be conditional as well, that is, based on the offender's repentance. The reason is that they hold that *καθὼς καί* ("just as also") refers to the sinner's repentance-conditionality. Adams (1989), for example, states,

Since our forgiveness is modeled after God's (Eph 4:32), it must be conditional. Forgiveness by God rests on clear, unmistakable conditions. The apostles did not merely announce that God had forgiven men, who should acknowledge and rejoice in the fact but, rather, they were sent forth to preach "repentance and the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 24:47; Acts 17:30). The sins of those who repented and trusted in the Saviour as the one who shed His blood for them were forgiven on the conditions of repentance and faith. (p. 38)

Scholars holding to conditional forgiveness, focus on the secondary condition, the sinner's reaction of repentance and faith, rather than on the primary theocentric condition of Jesus' atonement itself in securing the possibility of divine forgiveness. A closer examination of these two passages in Ephesians and Colossians is necessary to understand what they truly say.

Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:13 are part of teachings on sanctification. Paul argues that Christians should put off the old self's vices, such as bitterness, wrath, yelling, and slander (Col 3:9; Eph 4:22) and instead develop the virtues of a new self, such as compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience (Col 3:10; Eph 4:24).

All virtues and vices are relational in nature; but virtues are constructive and vices are destructive for relationships (Nelson, 2012). Love characterizes and is the foundation of all Christian virtues (Col 3:14; Eph 5:1-2). Forgiveness, like all Christian virtues, is being recreated into God's image (Melick, 1991). God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ is a virtue that features 'kindness and tender-heartedness' (Eph 4:32) on the basis of sacrificial love, and it is the opposite of vices, such as anger, bitterness, and slander (Eph 4:31). Christians, like God, therefore, should forgive others and forgo anger, bitterness, and slander.

In these verses in Ephesians and Colossians, Paul intentionally uses *χαρίζομαι* ("forgive"), which originates from *χάρις* ("grace"), to emphasize the character of both divine and human forgiveness; it is a free gift to the underserved (Thielman, 2010; Melick, 1991; Nelson, 2012). Harrison (2003) states that Paul deliberately uses the language of '*χάρις*' against the reciprocity system of his contemporary Greco-Roman society in order to emphasize God's unilaterally initiated grace through Christ. Thus, Paul must have thought about the unilateral offering of divine forgiveness on the basis of Jesus' atonement rather than the sinner's reciprocal reaction of repentance when he used the word *χαρίζομαι* ("forgive"). In other words, in these two passages *καθώς και* ("just as also") refers to the first theocentric unilateral condition of atonement rather than to the second human-oriented reciprocal condition of repentance. In this respect, Melick (1991) explains how Godlike human forgiveness is initiated before the sinner's repentance:

It obviously speaks to the offended party, not the offending one. It may be that the offending person had little, if any, awareness of what he had done. The offended should take initiative in enduring and forgiving, rather than waiting for the offender to apologize. By enduring and forgiving, the conscience is cleansed and the matter forgotten . . . the offended can think and act like Christ even toward the offender. Harboring resentment and ill will toward another does little good, and to do so is beneath Christians. Anyone can hold grudges, but the mark of Christians is that they do not. They forgive regardless. The pattern for this behavior is Christ's forgiving the believer. The term used here for forgiveness, *charizomai*, is the same that occurs in the command to the believer. Many parallels may be drawn. Most importantly, however, Paul spoke of the gracious act of Christ by which he initiated forgiveness of sins before confession occurred. The model stands as a constant challenge to believers. (p. 300)

Nelson (2012) also highlights the necessity to forgive without prior repentance on the part of the offender:

none of the commentaries considered for this study argued that Paul's comparison included the requirement of repentance. They all agreed that a believer's practice of forgiveness should be like God's in grace, mercy, kindness, and compassion. They also agreed that certain vices, such as anger and bitterness, characterize those who withhold forgiveness. (p. 37)

Therefore, Christian human forgiveness is characterized by the victim's gracious and initiating forgiveness, rather than by a conditional and reciprocal forgiveness which emphasizes the offender's duty of repentance. Most theologians throughout Christian history have correctly understood Godlike human forgiveness in these passages (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13; cf. Matt 6:14-15) as a unilateral, gracious, and unconditional activity. Based on Ephesians 4:32, Owen (1965) emphasizes the Christian victim's duty to forgive others so as to secure his own divine forgiveness (Matt 6:14-15); he does not mention the offender's duty of repentance and rather describes Christian human forgiveness as "forgiveness without limitation and bounds" (p. 498). Along these lines and based on Colossian 3:13, Spurgeon (1973) emphasizes the unilateral pre-offer of divine forgiveness and argues that Christians, consequently, should copy divine forgiveness by forgiving the undeserving; he, too, does not mention repentance as a precondition in the process of granting human forgiveness.

Above all, the verses following Ephesians 4:32 give even greater weight to the view that human forgiveness does not require repentance on the part of the offender.

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Eph 4:32-5:2)

Verse 5:1, which is Paul's commandment of imitating God, is placed between Godlike forgiveness in 4:32 and Godlike love in 5:2. These verses follow a parallel structure beginning with an imperative and followed by a subordinating sentence that starts with *καθὼς καί* ("just as also"). The two conjunctions of *οὖν* ("therefore") in 5:1 and *καί*

(“also” or “and”) in 5:2 denote that these three verses are connected very closely. Paul is saying that Godlike forgiveness (4:32) and Godlike love (5:2) cannot be separated from each other and are to be imitated. Furthermore, as Christians imitate God in these aspects (5:1), their love and forgiveness become stronger. In other words, when Christians forgive and love, they imitate God, and when Christians imitate God, they forgive and love better. Paul also points out that Jesus’ atonement, described with an “OT idiom for God’s acceptance of a sacrifice” as “a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God,” (5:2) is the best revelation of Godlike forgiveness and love (Thielman, 2010, p. 322). The words ‘sacrifice’ and ‘offering’ point out “the actual physical sacrifice Christ offered” (Morris, 1984, p. 64). Again, Jesus’ atoning sacrifice is the standard of Godlike human forgiveness (Lincoln, 1990).

What is Godlike human forgiveness? First of all, the most essential characteristic is that it is voluntarily, unilaterally, and unconditionally offered by a victim, independent of the offender’s reaction. We have already examined that, based on the NT, there are two stages or conditions in securing God’s forgiveness: the first is the unilateral atonement offered by God and the second is the sinner’s reaction of repentance. As demonstrated above, Paul considers the first stage to be the model for Christian human forgiveness, meaning that Godlike human forgiveness should not be contingent on the offender’s repentance; rather, it is unilaterally, unconditionally, and graciously offered, just as God freely prepared and offered forgiveness (Rom 5:8). Paul’s focus is on giving instructions to Christians who have been offended and in that light he presents Jesus’ atonement as a model for forgiveness. Thus, as MacArthur (2009) points out, Christians who understand human forgiveness to be conditioned upon the offender’s repentance are not interpreting Ephesians 4:32 and Colossian 3:13 properly:

To make conditionality the gist of Christlike forgiving seems to miss the whole point of what Scripture is saying. When Scripture instructs us to forgive in the manner we have been forgiven, what is in view is not the idea of withholding forgiveness until the offender expresses repentance. . . . The emphasis is on forgiving freely, generously, willingly, eagerly, speedily—and from the heart. The

attitude of the forgiver is where the focus of Scripture lies, not the terms of forgiveness. (pp. 118-19)

Christian human forgiveness, therefore, is in the first place, unilaterally and unconditionally offered to the offender.

Second, Godlike human forgiveness that imitates Jesus' atonement reflects sacrificial self-giving love. Human beings cannot atone for sin (Stott, 2006). According to Hebrews, even the Israelites' atonement through animal rituals in the OT neither removed sin nor cleared the conscience of the worshipper but just reminded the offenders of their sins (9:9; 10:1-7) (Thompson, 2008; Lane, 1991; Bruce, 1990; Morris, 1984). It is exactly because of this inability that Jesus came to the world to save sinners (Davies & Evans, 1998). Because there is no atonement possible in human forgiveness, the second stage of divine forgiveness, i.e., forgiveness being applied to the sinner based on his or her repentance, is not required for human forgiveness. Paul does not request Christians to imitate God with respect to the second stage. However, it is important to imitate the love with which God atoned for human sins; Jesus stood in the place of sinners because of divine unilateral and sacrificial love for his enemies (Volf, 2006a). This love is very deep, as Bauckham (2008) points out:

In the light of Jesus' divine sonship, the cross is God's act of self-identification with all people in that extremity of the human condition and that heart of all suffering that is the absence of God. It is the furthest point to which God's self-giving love in incarnation goes. (p. 267)

The apostle Peter, as well, calls Christians to imitate Christ's self-giving love which is revealed in Christ's atonement on the cross (1 Pet 2:21-25). Thus, Godlike human forgiveness is the unconditional giving of forgiveness through the victim's self-identification with the offender on the basis of unilateral self-giving love.

### **Motive for Human Forgiveness: Unilateral Love for One's Enemy**

The Bible evidences that Godlike forgiveness begins with love for one's enemies (Matt 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-37; 1 John 4:10-11; 1 Thess 5:15; 1 Pet 3:9-12) in the



same way as enemies are the object of divine self-giving love (Rom 5:8-10) (Carson, 2002; Bash, 2007; Cheong, 2005). According to the NT writers, one's enemies are those who do evil to Christians (1 Thess 5:15; Rom 12:17; 1 Pet 3:9), revile them (1 Pet 3:9; 1 Cor 4:12), or persecute them (Rom 12:14) (Piper, 2012). According to the Bible, the standards of love and forgiveness in the Old Covenant are extended and strengthened in the New Covenant era. God's command to "love your neighbor" in Leviticus 19:18 is extended to "love your enemies" (Matt 5:44) and the standard of love is intensified from loving "as yourself" in the OT to loving as God loves (Matt 5:43-47; Luke 6:27-36) (Cheong & DiBlasio, 2007). Based on Matthew 5:43-48, Carson (2002) asserts that in Jesus' era, many Jews assumed that they could hate their enemies, while loving their neighbors. Thus, Jesus' command to love enemies would have sounded very radical to the Jews. These raised standards are very natural because of the development of revelation in the NT, namely that the amazing gift of unconditional and irresistible grace entered into redemptive history. And "from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked" (Luke 12:48). Consequently, God's people are required to follow higher moral standards than in the OT (Heb 1:1-3). For example, in the NT the laws for marriage, divorce (Matt 19:3; Mark 10:2-9), and adultery (Matt 5:27-30) became stricter than in the OT. Rather than divorcing one's wife because of such trivial reasons as burnt food, Jesus talks about adultery as grounds for divorce (Carson, 1982). Regarding Matthew 5:45, Carson (2002) states that "our responsibility to love our enemies is grounded in the fact that God providentially loves the just and the unjust" (p. 15). In fact, according to 2 Timothy 3:2-4, self-love and unforgiveness are signs of fallen humanity. In other words, as Bash (2007) states as follows:

Christian forgiveness is predicated on the unconditional nature of God's love: just as God loves all people, so God's [offer of] forgiveness extends to all people. Christians are also to love all people, and their forgiveness is to extend to all people. (p. 104)

As frequently mentioned, the NT regards Jesus' atoning death on the cross as the

concrete standard or example of Christian love and forgiveness (1 John 4:7-11). Piper (2012) explains, “in all of the places where Christ is the example, loving, self-giving behavior is exhorted” (p. 62). Worthington states that human forgiveness based on “other-oriented love,” or empathy, is more effective than forgiveness based on self-love (Worthington, 2003, p. 120). Thus, Godlike human forgiveness includes a certain form of self-denial on the part of the victim.

The passages of Matthew 5:38-48 and Luke 6:27-36 describe Jesus’ teaching on enemy love. According to Jesus, Christian enemy love is a combination of both passive non-retaliation (verses 38-42) and active acts of love (verses 43-48) (Stott, 1985). With regard to non-retaliation, Jesus emphasizes the strong need of self-control against the natural human desire of getting even. Getting even is related to the OT notion of justice (Exod 21:24; Lev 24:20; Deut 19:21), where justice was accomplished when the offender engaged in some kind of atoning activity or received punishment. This law of justice is hard-wired in human beings as an aspect of being God’s image bearer (Myers & Enns, 2009). Empirically, the victim’s claim to justice or revenge often can be one of the most serious barriers to forgiving the offender (Worthington, 2009). However, Jesus encourages Christians to reject this natural human tendency of getting even, even at the cost of more abuse or loss.

Jesus uses four examples to teach non-retaliation. The first is about the evil of physical abuse in verse 39 where Jesus teaches his people not to resist an evil person, saying “whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.” The Greek word *πονηρός* (“evil”) can be translated both evil and evil person (BDAG). The usage of this word suggests that Jesus does not deny but rather admits that what happened to the victim is evil and that the malicious offender is evil (Stott, 1985). Thus, Christian forgiveness does not mean the denial or condoning of evil; in fact, it begins with the awareness that the offender has sinned. Being slapped on the right cheek (v. 39) suggests a right backhanded or left handed slap, either of which was the Jewish way of intentional

insult suggesting a fight (Blomberg, 1992; Harrington, 1991; Nolland, 2005). However, Jesus demands his people to react on this malicious intention with the exact opposite intention. The Greek word for “turn,” as in “turning” the other cheek (“στρέψον,” v. 39), refers to volitional change (BDAG). Thus the victim’s action refers to the volitional rejection of the human natural tendency to retaliate on the offender’s intentional abuse, even though the renunciation of revenge may result in more abuse from the offender, such as more slaps (Blomberg, 1992). However, it does not suggest that Christian victims should deliberately invite more offence from the offender or become a voluntary victim (Ferguson, 1988; Stott, 1985). The reason is that Christians ought to help others not to commit sin against them. Jesus showed ultimate self-control and love towards his enemies at the time of his death by renouncing revenge but never by evoking more evil from his offenders. He also exemplified during his public life how, rather than being passive or a doormat, he powerfully debated with Jewish religious leaders teaching them God’s truth (Matt 9:9-17; 12:1-45; John 6:41-59; 8:1-59; Luke 19:45-20:44). Therefore, the intent of this illustration is to demonstrate the importance of the victim’s intention of non-retaliation.

The second example of non-retaliation (v.40) assumes the OT legal context (Exod 22:26-27) that stipulates that the outer clothing of poor people should be returned. Jesus goes even further, exhorting Christians to give their own outer clothing as well. If taken literally, these Christians could be naked. Therefore, the illustrations in this passage should be regarded as an exaggeration for emphasis, rather than as a command to follow literally; Jesus teaches Christians to be generous by doing more than the legal or moral requirements, even at times of opposition or suffering (Blomberg, 1992).

The third example of going the extra mile (v. 41) should be understood against the historical background where Roman soldiers had the right to force civilians to carry their equipment. Being chosen for this service meant “public humiliation of being a subjugated people” (Ferguson, 1988, p. 101). This was also the case for Simon of Cyrene

who was forced to carry the cross instead of Jesus (Mark 15:21). Jesus, thus, urges his followers not to resist humiliation but to serve even more, despite the shame related to this situation. Ferguson (1988) explains that this kind of grace “makes him or her seek to win others by love rather than retaliate on the basis of ‘rights’” (p. 101).

The last example (v. 42) is about financial or material generosity to others. However, this generous giving should not feed the covetousness of others (cf. Luke 12:13-15) (Blomberg, 1992) but refers to giving to whoever is in genuine need.

These four examples show that Jesus teaches his people to respond contrary to the natural human tendency to seek justice on the basis of ‘an eye for an eye,’ and, instead, demonstrate love and generosity in the face of offense. Thus, rather than seemingly passive responses, the reactions of the victims in these illustrations of non-retaliation are powerfully active in breaking sinful human relational processes and transforming them through new ways of love and mercy. Neufeld (2011) states that “in each of these mini-parables victims do not behave as victims. Nor do they perform a predictable script of rebellion, retaliation or acquiescence. These are clearly ways in which the ‘spiral of violence’ is disrupted if not broken” (p. 25). Thus, Christ’s teaching on enemy love is aimed to strengthen the personal agency of the victim, who changes the effects of what has already happened through his own intentional and creative choice of activities.

In the second part of this passage in Matthew 5 (verses 43-48), Jesus emphasizes positive love of one’s enemy, expanding the OT commandment of neighbor love (Lev 19:18). Unlike in the OT, neighbors and enemies are no longer differentiated in the NT; the neighbor is a person in need, as is the enemy (Stott, 1985). Because this enemy love features unilaterality regardless of the other party’s reaction (vv. 44-45), it is not conditional upon reciprocity or rewards (vv. 46-47). Christians, following their loving Father, love their enemies by praying for and greeting their enemies. The purpose of this prayer is reconciliation and it should include praying for the enemies’ receiving of both

divine and human forgiveness through repentance of sin. This model of Christian forgiveness reflects Jesus' continual intercession for sinful Christians (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25; 9:24), so that they are reconciled to God their Father. As Erickson (2013) argues, "[h]e also pleads the cause of his righteousness for believers who, while previously justified, continue to sin" (p. 703). God's people should, thus, be different from other people who follow the natural human tendency (v. 47). According to verses 45 and 48, Christian enemy love is characterized by God-like love, which goes against the natural human tendency of reciprocity, and is grounded in God's providential love over creation (Carson, 2002). The expression 'be perfect' in verse 48 reads 'be merciful' in the parallel verse found in Luke 6:36. In this respect, Ferguson (1988) seems to be right when he states that the word 'perfect' in verse 48 is about the unilaterality of God-like love:

The mark of 'perfection' in the Christian is just this: his love is not determined by the loveliness or the attractiveness he finds in its object. His love is not conditional upon his being loved first. His love is not directed only towards those whose love he can rely on in return. No, his love is controlled by the knowledge that when he was God's enemy and a sinner, the Father first loved him. (p. 104)

However, this unconditional Christian enemy love does not suggest that Christian should always be nice and never be angry (Carson, 2002). In fact, Christian enemy love can exist side by side with anger. After all, God was angry with sinful Israel, but loved it nevertheless (Stott, 1985; Carson, 2002). Carson points out that these are not different kinds of loves but just different ways God's love becomes evident, depending on its object or situation. Applications of Jesus' teaching on enemy love are found in passages of the apostles and NT writers who, afterward, paraphrased and expanded this kind of love (Rom 12: 16-21) (Piper, 2012).

In short, in the NT, Christian enemy love is characterized by non-retaliation and it reacts upon evil with good. Christian victims should become active personal agents who go against the natural human tendency of retaliation and reciprocity and act in transforming ways by forgiving on the basis of enemy love.

## **Purpose of Human Forgiveness: Reconciliation**

In the OT, reconciliation between God and Israel is the purpose of forgiveness. In the NT, reconciliation, founded on Jesus' atonement, is the development towards the reconciliation of all things, including the restoration of all of creation (Col 1:20); it is the goal of God's forgiveness and, thus, becomes the purpose of human forgiveness as well (Matt 5:24; Col 3:15; Eph 2:16; Rom 12:18; Heb 12:14; 1 Thess 5:13). Plantinga (1996) states, "shalom is God's design for creation and redemption" (p. 16) and "sin is culpable shalom-breaking" (p. 14). Because of the scope of this universal reconciliation, Christians' relationships with unbelievers are included in human forgiveness. As personal agents who imitate God, who is the sovereign initiator of divine forgiveness, Christians can initiate and grant forgiveness to all kinds of people, including unbelievers, regardless of whether they repent or not.

Reconciliation is obviously different from forgiveness, however. Biblically, forgiveness is primarily a gift, granted on the basis of the victim's free decision to be a forgiver instead of a victim; it is a unilateral act. Reconciliation, however, is always bilateral, involving both the victim's unilateral forgiveness and the shalom-breaker's repentance. Repentance and forgiveness together pave the way towards peace, i.e., the state of reconciliation. These two means of reconciliation were revealed most manifestly on the cross. Christ, as the second Adam, took on the role of substitute for all human sinners who ought to repent (Rom 5:14-19; 1 Cor 15:22), and as the Son of God, the primary offended party, represents human victims. Both human offenders and victims are, thus, represented on the cross. Human beings should repent of their sins with regard to whom they sinned against, both God and human beings, and as victims of offense they are to forgive their offenders, just as God forgave them. As we have already noted, the offender's role of repentance, emphasized in the OT, and the victim's role of love and forgiveness, stressed in the NT, meet at the cross, where justice and love were likewise

joined. The cross shows the duty of repentance and the right of forgiveness; it is the place where God and man and offender and victim, are reconciled. Jones (1995) writes “Jesus’ pardon is all-powerful precisely because it calls us—as those who have been forgiven—to seek forgiveness from those we have sinned against and to offer forgiveness to those who have sinned against us” (p. 127). Thus, recipients of divine forgiveness through Jesus turn to a life of reconciliation and communion not only with God but with others as well through a life of forgiveness and repentance.

**The preeminent role of the victim.** As demonstrated, the NT highlights God’s intention that Christians forgive those who sin against them; forgiveness is supposed to be their habitual virtuous activity and part of the process of sanctification. Nolland (1993) states that Jesus’ concept of forgiveness is different from that of the Jews of his day:

In traditional Jewish approaches to forgiveness, the burden lies with the one seeking forgiveness to demonstrate the genuineness of his or her repentance. With Jesus, the emphasis is on the readiness to forgive, no matter what strain is put on the capability to forgive. (p. 838)

In the OT, the sinner’s repenting duty to satisfy God’s justice was critically important in the process of securing both divine and human forgiveness. Whereas offenders, such as Joseph’s brothers, Jacob, and Abigail, had an important role in human forgiveness, the victims’ role was merely reactive.

The NT turns this upside down. Jesus teaches in Matthew 18:15-17 that the Christian victim is to go to the unrepentant offender repetitively to point out his fault until he repents. Morris (1992) argues that ‘go’ in Matthew 18:15 “means taking the initiative; the person in the clear is not to wait for the sinner to come to him” (p. 467). The victim’s proactive attempts to reconcile through repetitive confrontation to bring about the offender’s repentance is important. The purpose of the victim’s rebuke or confrontation is not for the victim to point out the faults of the perpetrator, but to help him or her repent and be forgiven for the goal of reconciliation. However, according to the apostle Paul, the victim’s confrontation should be gentle and humble (Gal 6:1-2; cf.

Prov 25:15). Bruner (2004) states that if the victim's confrontation is not gentle, "everything is ruined. Some confrontation is more sinful than the sin it confronts" (p. 226). This crucial role of the offended in forgiveness and reconciliation is very similar to archetypical divine forgiveness in the NT, which is initiated and offered freely by God as the offended party (Rom 5:8; Luke 15). As a result, progressing beyond the OT, which only discusses God as the forgiving subject, the NT also describes the Christian victim as the subject of forgiveness (Matt 18:33, 35). Furthermore, both divine and human forgivers are more proactive in the NT than in the OT. The analogy between the divine and human offended, which had been somewhat implicit in the OT, becomes very explicit in the NT. Hence, there is also a strong analogy between divine and human forgiveness: just as God initiated their forgiveness unilaterally through Jesus' atonement, so should Christian victims forgive their offenders proactively (Rom 5:8). NT victims are to initiate forgiveness and help their brother-offenders to repent of their sins, so they too can become more conformed to Christ's image.

Matthew 18:15-17 shows that this does not mean that Christian victims should always be nice to unrepentant brothers. Rather, in this passage, Christian love is expressed as repetitive confrontation leading to the disciplining of the offender. Again, God's love is applied differently in different situations (Carson, 2002). This implies that Christian love can also be expressed differently in various contexts. It could be expressed in being strict or in showing no emotions until there is true reconciliation through genuine repentance and restitution. God's justified wrathful expression of love in dealing with Israel's idolatry of the golden calf led to the Israelites' deepened repentance (Exod 32-33). The victim's more negative expression of love could be important for purposes of reconciliation and sanctification of the offender; forgiveness, however, should not be withheld, except in the case of church discipline and under direct divine approval.

According to the Lord's prayer in Matthew 6, the offendees' duty seems to be much greater than the offenders', because it is directly related to their receiving divine



forgiveness (Matt 6:12, 14, 15). Further, when Peter asked Jesus how many times they should forgive, Jesus answered that it should be up to seventy-seven times (Matt 18:22). Seventy-seven times means one should forgive with no limit (Blomberg, 2006). As a result, the offende stops being a victimized person, who merely reacts and is dependent on the offender's repentance, but, instead, becomes a proactive and reformatve initiator or author of human forgiveness; in doing so God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ is beautifully reflected. The active role of the human victim is the most remarkable change in forgiveness in the NT as compared to the OT. Since Christ's death on the cross, Christians know and have received the abundance of God's grace, therefore, much is required of them (Luke 12:48), also in terms of forgiveness.

Despite the relationship between human and divine forgiveness, human victims cannot reflect God in every aspect. Though they are to forgive like God, Christians should never retaliate against others, even though God does (Jas 4:12; Rom 12:19; Heb 10:30; Luke 6:37; Matt 7:1). Romans 12:19 reads: "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord." God is a God of both love and justice; he is both a loving father and a punishing judge (Exod 34:6-7; Num 14:18; Prov 3:12; Heb 12:7). As God's image bearers, people recognize justice and love. Thus, when they are offended, they become angry because of the injustice done to them, and they may want to assume God's role of judge or getting even (Jones, 2012). However, Christians are to reflect God only in loving and forgiving and not in punishing and avenging like God. The analogy between divine and human forgiveness knows limits; human beings are not God and cannot forgive in exactly the same way God does.

**The goal of the offender's repentance.** Although the NT places greater emphasis on the victim's forgiveness than on the offender's repentance, the latter is important as well (Matt 5:23-25; 18:15-20; Luke 17:3). Although repentance cannot be

the cause for or establish forgiveness—after all, this is solely the victim’s choice—repentance is necessarily involved in receiving forgiveness and accomplishing reconciliation. Volf (2006a) states,

If they imitate the forgiving God, forgivers will keep forgiving, whether the offenders repent or not. Forgivers’ forgiving is not conditioned by repentance. The offenders’ *being forgiven*, however, is conditioned by repentance—just as being given a box of chocolate is conditioned by receiving that box of chocolate. Without repentance, the forgivers will keep forgiving but the offenders will remain unforgiven, in that they are untouched by that forgiveness. Why? Because they *refuse* to be forgiven. (p. 183)

Jesus emphasizes the strong need of repentance in Matthew 5:23-26, by teaching that before offering a gift to God, the offender should initiate reconciliation by repenting to those they offended. Note that in a first century Jewish context, it might have taken a long time and a lot of energy to travel anywhere to go and repent (Bailey, 2013). Thus, the difficulty of repentance stands in contrast to the easiness of forgiveness; after all, the victim can forgive any time, even during prayer (Mark 11:25). The need to reconcile with others before offering to God reflects OT and Jewish sacrificial traditions that teach that repentance is a prerequisite to receiving divine or human forgiveness. Christians’ offenses to others become barriers in their relationship with God (Klassen, 1966), in the same way as one’s unwillingness to forgive becomes a barrier (Mark 11:25).

Fallen humans often find it hard to admit that they are offenders and that they are responsible for their wrongdoings. Adam, Lamech, Joseph’s brothers, and Jacob are examples from the OT who try to postpone repentance as long as possible. Jones (1995) points out that that is why reconciliation does not happen; people tend to prefer to forgive, rather than to ask for forgiveness. However, Christians are exhorted to overcome this natural aversion to repentance. After all, becoming a Christian starts by identifying oneself as sinner and consequently repenting to God. Subsequently they continue to repent not only to God, the primary offended party, but also to their human victims. Thus, Jones (1995) points out that both forgiveness and repentance should characterize the Christian’s ongoing life pattern in the process of sanctification; “for those who have

accepted forgiveness of Sin by God and have thereby been initiated into God's inbreaking Kingdom, failure either to forgive or to repent—including seeking forgiveness from those whom we have sinned against—are equally scandalous” (p. 154). As a result, there should be a balanced emphasis on both forgiveness and repentance in relational issues. Repentance and confession of sins are crucial for mortification, which is part of the Christian's ongoing sanctification process. Ferguson (2000) states, “repentance is a characteristic of the whole life, not the action of a single moment” (p. 13). Christians will experience the old self through certain habits and actions in relational problems; these sinful patterns can be mortified through confession of sin and restitution. Just as in the OT sacrificial rituals helped in one's transformation, so through continual confession and repentance Christians are increasingly transformed into the image of Christ (1 John 1:9). In this respect, Luther mentioned in his Ninety-five Theses that Jesus meant “the whole life of a believer to be a practice of repentance” (Gibson & Gibson, 2013, p. 69).

### **The Inseparable Relation between Divine and Human Forgiveness**

According to the NT, the context of Christian human forgiveness is divine forgiveness (Matt 18:21-35; Eph 4:32; Col 3:13). In other words, being forgiven by God is closely connected with forgiving others. In Matthew 18:23-35, Jesus talks about the parable of the unforgiving servant who fails to release the little debt of his brother, although he had just experienced the cancellation of an enormous debt he owed the king. From the king's perspective it is only natural that the recipients of his forgiveness should imitate him and be merciful forgivers themselves (v. 33). Because of his unforgiveness, the servant came to lose the gracious forgiveness he had earlier secured from the king. Carson (2002) states,

In the light of all that the New Testament writers say about grace and change of heart, it would be obtuse to understand these passages as if they were suggesting that a person could earn forgiveness by forgiving others. The point is more subtle. It is that people disqualify themselves from being forgiven if they are so hardened in their own bitterness that they cannot or will not forgive others. In such cases, they

display no brokenness, no contrition, no recognition of the great value of forgiveness, no understanding of their own complicity in sin, no repentance. (p. 79)

Forgiving others is an important sign that people are truly saved by God through genuine repentance. Thus, the servant's unforgiving spirit is evidence that he failed in receiving God's forgiveness genuinely (Blomberg, 1992). His repentance was not from the heart (Heb 10:22; Rom 2:5; Jer 31:33). For the servant "the unforgiving spirit is essentially unrepentance" (*ISBE*, p. 1133). The heart in the Bible is "the core identity of a person" (Nolland, 2005, p.762), the place where genuine repentance and Godlike forgiveness originate. Only a heart that is transformed and graced by the Spirit with genuine repentance can be granted God's forgiveness and only a heart that is united with Christ can learn to extend true forgiveness. Divine and human forgiveness are thus inseparable.

This relationship is also evident in the Lord's Prayer where human forgiveness is described as a precondition of divine forgiveness; Christians are to forgive others in order to receive daily sanctifying divine forgiveness (Matt 6:12, 14-15; Mark 11:25; Luke 11:4). The Lord's Prayer implies that Christian human forgiveness should be as habitual as daily eating. In Luke 11:4, which is a parallel of Matthew 6:12, the conjunction γάρ ("because") is used instead of ὡς ("as"), and the second verb ἀφίλομεν ("forgive") is present tense, denoting continuous action (Nelson, 2012). Thus, the sentence in the Lord's Prayer in Luke 11:4 should be interpreted as "God would forgive us because we are continually forgiving those who sin against us" (Stein, 1993, p. 326). In other words, this ongoing habitual life of forgiving is "a necessary condition" for daily divine forgiveness (Nolland, 2005, p. 291). Luke 6:37 says, "do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned." The three passive verbs here are divine passives, and the conjunction καί ("and") can denote a result clause meaning "so that" (Nelson, 2012, p. 49). Thus, Luke 6:37 could also be read, as a result of your not judging others, God will not condemn you....and as a result of your pardoning others, God will pardon you. Again, divine forgiveness results after human forgiveness, and the inseparable relationship becomes

evident. Thus, daily forgiving others is evidence that Christians have received salvific divine forgiveness, and it is grounds for receiving daily sanctifying forgiveness. While in the OT repentance through atonement was a precondition to secure God's forgiveness, in the NT, human forgiveness, additionally, becomes a condition of securing divine forgiveness (Barton & Reimer, 1996). Emerson (1964) explains that "when Jesus said that we must forgive if we are to be forgiven, he was saying that the instrument that helps make our own forgiveness real to us is the very act of forgiving others" (p. 81). Thus, for Christians, divine and human forgiveness are co-dependent, because the former is the basis that brings about the latter and the latter becomes again the evidence and condition of the former.

### **Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Aspects of Human Forgiveness in the NT**

We have already studied that the unshakable foundation of Christian human forgiveness is unilateral divine forgiveness wrought through Jesus' atonement out of love for sinners, that is, his enemies, obtained through faith and repentance. Thus, Christians forgive voluntary, independent of the reaction of the offender, thus rejecting the law of reciprocity. The NT contains various passages about human forgiveness (Mark 11:25, Luke 11:4; 17:3-4; Matt 6:12-15; 18:15-17). However, since these passages are interpreted differently depending on whether scholars understand them to support conditional or unconditional human forgiveness, we will now take a closer look at them.

**Mark 11:25.** "Whenever you stand praying, forgive (*ἀφίημι*), if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions." Jesus' statement here is used to support both unconditional, unilateral forgiveness and conditional forgiveness. Adams (1994), a proponent of conditional forgiveness, understands Mark 11:25 in terms of having the attitude of "willingness to forgive" and being "ready to forgive," (p. 35) rather than the actual granting of

forgiveness. Sande's view (2004) seems to be very similar to Adams in that he believes that Mark 11:25 is about "having an attitude of forgiveness" unconditionally, but that Luke 17:3 shows that "granting forgiveness" is conditional upon the offender's repentance (p. 211).

However, upon closer examination, forgiveness in Mark 11:25 must be about the offended party's unilateral forgiveness during his prayer without any requests, such as repentance or restitution (MacArthur, 2009; Jones, 2012; Nelson, 2012). MacArthur argues,

That [Mk 11:25-26] describes an immediate forgiveness granted to the offender with no formal meeting or transaction required. It necessarily refers to a pardon that is wholly unilateral, because this forgiveness takes place *while the forgiver stands praying*. "Forgive" is the clear command of that verse, and it is to take place on the spot. There is no mention of confrontation. There is no command to seek the offender's repentance. (p. 121)

Further, "the words 'anything' (*ti*) and 'anyone' (*tis*) are indefinite pronouns, making this verse broadly inclusive. This means that no offense or offender is to be excluded from our forgiveness" (Nelson, 2012, p. 38). Thus, forgiveness in this passage is about the victim's unconditional forgiveness of any offender regardless of the offender's reaction. Additionally, there is no evidence that the verb ἀφίημι ("forgive") here should be understood as having willingness to forgive, which is what proponents of conditional forgiveness argue because of its use in Luke 17:3-4. In fact, Mark 11:25 should be understood in the broader context of Mark 11:20-25, where Jesus' disciples asked (11:12-14) why the fig tree Jesus had cursed withered (vv. 20-21), upon which Jesus answered that the reason was the power of faith in God (vv. 22-23). Subsequently, Jesus talks about praying in faith without doubts (v. 24) and the necessity of forgiveness during prayer (v. 25). Doubt and unforgiveness, thus, seem to be highlighted here with the purpose of showing they can be barriers in one's relationship with God. It implies that "for Jesus, both faith in God and forgiveness of others are prerequisites of effective prayer," (Nelson, 2012, p. 38), which also suggests that Mark 11:25 talks about actual forgiveness

in faith. This forgiveness in faith will be actualized, because Jesus promises twice that what one asks in faith will happen: “what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him,” (23) and “all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you” (24).

Forgiveness in Mark 11:25 is intrapersonal forgiveness which happens in the victim’s own heart (Mark 11:23). During prayer, the victim may become aware of unforgiving emotions and willfully decide to forgive the offender in faith during this prayer. If the offense is trivial, the victim’s forgiveness during the prayer may include both decisional and emotional forgiveness. In contrast, if the offense is serious, the victim’s intrapersonal forgiveness might be mainly decisional, because willfully granting forgiveness can be done in a moment while granting emotional forgiveness—which includes having positive emotions such as love or compassion—may take more time (Worthington, 2003; 2006). Thus, intrapersonal forgiveness, here, involves decisional forgiveness, and may include emotional forgiveness, but it may not. However, decisional forgiveness does not necessarily precede emotional forgiveness; in some cases, when the offender suffers seriously, the victim can feel compassion and forgive the offender emotionally first (Worthington, 2006). Thus, unlike Adams (1994) and Sande (2004) who believe forgiveness here means just being ready to grant forgiveness, Jones (2012) labels this forgiveness properly “as attitudinal, heart, or dispositional forgiveness” which happens in the victim’s heart without repentance of or contact with the offender (p. 132). This makes sense in the light of Jesus’ emphasis on the heart, which is the source of all human vices and virtues (Matt 15:19; Luke 6:45). Just as Jesus equates lustful thoughts with the actual sinful practice of adultery, so intrapersonal forgiveness in Mark 11:15 is real forgiveness from the heart (Mark 11:23; cf. Matt 18:35).

**Matthew 6:12, 14-15 and Luke 11:4.** “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matt 6:12). “For if you forgive others for their

transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions” (Matt 6:14-15). “And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us” (Luke 11:4). There is no explicit evidence whether these verses from the Lord’s Prayer (Matt 6:9-13; Luke 11:1-4) refer to conditional or unconditional forgiveness. Nevertheless, proponents of conditional forgiveness interpret these verses from their own perspective. Lewis (2012), for example, believes that the condition of repentance is presupposed in Matthew 6:12. Brauns (2008) also argues there must be repentance before human forgiveness, since God’s forgiveness is also conditional upon repentance:

It is true in these verses that Jesus does not explicitly utter a condition of repentance. However, the requirement is implicit. In Matthew 6, Jesus told the disciples to forgive as God forgives. He does not explicitly mention this in Matthew 6, but we learn from other passages that God’s forgiveness is indeed conditional. (p. 146)

The Lord’s Prayer, however, gives no evidence that repentance is a prerequisite for human forgiveness. The focus is not on repentance as a condition for granting forgiveness, but on ongoing daily forgiveness, in the same way as the prayer asks for daily food (v. 11). This prayer (Matt 6:12-15) implies that the offender (Luke 11:4) has a debt that should be repaid to the victim as a creditor. However, in order not to experience barriers in one’s relationship with God and to receive God’s forgiveness—daily sanctifying divine forgiveness for believers—the victim should cancel the debt willingly like God does, even though the victim has a right to request repayment. In this respect, Nelson (2012) states that “the failure of offenders to acknowledge their sins should not hinder the offended from fulfilling his duty to forgive those sins. Why should the offended be held hostage by the offender’s inability or unwillingness to repent?” (p. 41). Thus, the central idea is that Christians should not withhold but willingly grant forgiveness to others (Harrington, 1991).

**Luke 17:3-4 and Matthew 18:15-17.** “Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day,



and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive (ἀφίημι) him" (Luke 17:3-4).

Matthew 18:15-17 reads,

If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

These two parallel passages are often used to argue for conditional human forgiveness. Brauns (2008), who supports conditional forgiveness, states that Luke 17:3-4 affirms that Christian human forgiveness should be granted conditionally because "God's forgiveness is conditional" (p. 57). Regarding Matthew 18:15-17, Adams (1994) argues that "if forgiveness were unconditional, then this entire process of discipline would be impossible. It is my contention that the very existence of such a program as this requires us to believe that forgiveness is conditional" (p. 33). Lewis (2012), supporting conditional forgiveness, says about Luke 17:3,

The word "if" (Grk. εαν) introduces the condition for a rebuke and for granting forgiveness. If (subjunctive) a person sins, we must (imperative) rebuke him, and if (subjunctive) he repents, we must (imperative) forgive him. This is as clear a statement as you will find on the subject. Forgiveness is conditioned upon repentance—and this is one of the same criteria that God requires before He forgives sin. (p. 3)

Those who hold to unconditional forgiveness, on the contrary, believe these passages refer not to conditional forgiveness but to reconciliation, and that there is no direction for Christians to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant offender. Jeffress (2000), for example, believes that "forgiveness—releasing someone of his obligation to us for the wrong committed against us—is an action that takes place solely within our own heart" (p. 78). He argues that the Hebrew word heart refers to one's mind (cf. Matt 18:35) and forgiveness is then in fact "a rational choice" (p. 78). He says about Luke 17:3-4, "Nowhere in this verse does Jesus advise withholding forgiveness from a person who refuses to repent" (p. 80). Jeffress, however, does not acknowledge both interpersonal (Luke 17:3-4; Matt 18:15-17) and intrapersonal forgiveness (Mark 11:25);

rather he focuses only on the latter. Further, though Jeffress is correct about Luke 17:3-4 where Jesus does not mention withholding forgiveness, Jesus does talk about the possibility of Christian victims withholding verbal or interpersonal forgiveness for the purpose of church discipline (cf. Matt 18:15-17, Luke 17:3-4). So now we will examine Matthew 18:15-17.

Matthew 18:15 shows that the purpose of the victim's confrontation is to win the offender through his repentance: "if your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother" (Matt 18:15). As we mentioned before, the Christian offender has the duty of initiating reconciliation by repenting to the victim quickly (Matt 5:21-26), Matthew 18:15, on the other hand, emphasizes the fact that the victim should initiate reconciliation (Bruner, 2004). The phrase, "gain the brother" in Matthew 18:15 refers to restoration of the offender as a sinful church member and reconciliation of the broken relationship between two Christians (Worthington, 2006; Nelson, 2012). These passages describe the ideal process concerning broken relationships with unrepentant offenders: the victim initiates and shows the offender his fault and rebukes, the offender listens and repents, verbal or interpersonal forgiveness is granted, and reconciliation ensues. The goal according to these passages is not so much forgiveness itself, but reconciliation, which is always bilateral. As mentioned before, the necessary condition for the offender to obtain forgiveness—not the victim's granting of biblical Godlike human forgiveness, which reflects Jesus' atonement and is always unilateral in nature (Rom 5:8; Eph 4:32-5:2)—is repentance. As a result of the victim's forgiveness and the offender's repentance, reconciliation happens. In other words, the reason the victim has to confront the offender is not because he cannot forgive the offender without repentance, but because he cannot restore the relationship without the offender's repentance; moreover, he would deprive the sinful brother of a chance to grow spiritually. So in this passage, the victim's concern is focused not on himself or herself, but on the offending party's spiritual growth (France, 2007).

Additionally, the contexts of these two passages (Luke 17:3-4; Matt 18:15-17) seem to involve serious personal conflict between Christians, since church discipline might be necessary (Matt 18:18-20). The early church emphasized the virtue of love covering the brother's offense (1 Pet 4:8; 1 Cor 13:5); trivial offenses would, thus, be covered through intrapersonal forgiveness (cf. Mark 11:25). However, serious offenses that compromise the relationship between Christians should be dealt with differently. Not only intrapersonal nonverbal forgiveness, but also interpersonal verbal forgiveness leading to reconciliation is needed (Matt 18:15-17; Luke 17:3-4). So, not only does the NT contain passages about overlooking others' offenses, there are also various passages about confrontation or rebuke (Luke:3-4; Matt 18:15; 1 Cor 5:11-13; Gal 6:1-2; 1 Tim 5:20; Titus 3:10; Jas 5:19-20) (Jones, 2012). In the case of serious offenses, even though the victim may have forgiven unilaterally, real tension in the relationship with the offender may exist until reconciliation is fully accomplished through communication with the offender. For example, if a person's best friend gossiped about him to other church members, the person can forgive (*ἀφίημι*) the offender unilaterally (Mark 11:25); in addition, he may visit the offender to explain how he was hurt by what happened. Then, if the offender apologizes and asks forgiveness, the victim might say, "I forgive (*ἀφίημι*) you" (Luke 17:3-4). The initial intrapersonal forgiveness is then applied to the repenting offender by way of interpersonal forgiveness and reconciliation may ensue.

However, verbal interpersonal forgiveness may seem conditional or bilateral, because of its bilateral end of reconciliation, but it is based in unilateral intrapersonal forgiveness. After all, according to Jesus, Christian forgiveness should always come from the heart (Matt 18:35) rather than just be an empty behavior. After the Christian victim has first unilaterally and unconditionally extended intrapersonal forgiveness from the heart (Matt 18:35), interpersonal forgiveness may then be offered as a speech act, that is, a verbal act of using words to make something happen (Briggs, 2001). The offender, after having repented, will consequently receive this public declaration of forgiveness.

Holmgren (2012) points out that seemingly bilateral forgiveness is, in fact, one of the various forms of the victim's unilateral and unconditional forgiveness:

The victim's unilateral cultivation of an attitude of unconditional genuine forgiveness does not preclude what is commonly referred to as "bilateral" forgiveness. Once the victim has adopted an attitude of unconditional genuine forgiveness toward the offender, her interactions with him can take a variety of forms. The offender may repent and apologize to the victim, and the victim may then tell the offender that she forgives him (bilateral forgiveness). The victim may initiate an open and compassionate discussion of the wrong with the offender in hopes that the offender will repent and that some kind of social relationship between them can be restored (invitational forgiveness). Or the victim and offender may never engage in an open discussion of the wrong (because the offender is dead or otherwise incapacitated, or because he does not believe that that he did anything wrong, or because he is not sorry for having committed the wrong, or for some other reason), while the victim forgives the offender nonetheless. (p. 65)

In short, the offender's unrepentance cannot inhibit the victim's granting of unilateral forgiveness. Although in Luke 17:3-4 and Matthew 18:15-17 the intended result (the perlocutionary aspect) of the speech act of forgiveness is reconciliation, various endings are possible. For example, the victim can grant only intrapersonal or both intrapersonal and interpersonal forgiveness to the offender who rejects seeking forgiveness.

Consequently, though unconditional human forgiveness might seem to have different forms, there remains just one model consisting of the victim's *unconditional* granting of forgiveness and the offender's *conditional attainment* of forgiveness after repentance, resulting in reconciliation. In other words, this model emphasizes both independent roles of the victim and the offender. The Christian victim is a personal agent as God's image bearer and can forgive the offender at any time, or in any situation. He does this by becoming an author of human forgiveness like God, instead of waiting for the offender's repentance; however, the offender cannot receive forgiveness without seeking forgiveness through repentance.

The interpretation that forgiveness in Luke 17:3-4 and Matthew 18:15-17 is of the same kind as the unilateral forgiveness in Mark 11:25 is probable when one looks at it from Jesus' perspective. According to Jesus, all human behavior results from invisible thoughts in the heart (Matt 5:27-28; 15:19; Luke 6:45; Jas 1:14-15; Rom 7:19-23).

Christian human forgiveness should then be understood as a process developing through several stages; first, it originates from the victim's heart, mainly as decisional forgiveness, and, second, it grows to be verbal and emotional forgiveness. Thus, as "the good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil" (Matt 12:35), so the forgiving man will bring out of the forgiveness of his heart, verbal and emotional forgiveness (cf. Matt 5:28). Therefore, the view that unilateral forgiveness from the heart (Mark 11:23-25) is not actual forgiveness until the moment the sinner repents is inconsistent with Jesus' perspective.

Returning to the earlier discussion of church discipline (Matt 18:15-17), the last stage in this process (v. 17) is the implementation of church discipline against an unrepentant Christian through the process of excommunication. This is the only case in which verbal interpersonal forgiveness is withheld until the sinner repents. In fact, in the early church, in the case of excommunication of a brother who had committed a serious sin, forgiveness, as part of church discipline, was withheld by the whole church (1 Cor 5:1-13; 2 Cor 2:5-11). In the last stage then, rather than being merely personal, public forgiveness and reconciliation, becomes an issue of the whole church (Carson, 1995; Witherington, 2006). As mentioned already, Jesus gave the church community the authority of church discipline (Matt 18:18-20; 16:19; John 20:23). Consequently, the forgiveness that the church, as God's agent, can grant or withhold is divine forgiveness, which is in line with divine activity (John 20:23) (Turner, 2008; Hagner, 1995). Therefore, in this last stage of church discipline, one needs to think about two kinds of forgiveness by two different subjects: the church's divine forgiveness and the victim's human forgiveness. First, with regard to the church's divine forgiveness, the church treats the unrepentant offender "as a Gentile and a tax collector" (Matt 18:17), that is, as a person outside the assembly, who is nonetheless to be reached out to by Christians (v. 17) (Blomberg, 1992; Hays, 1996; Allison, 2012). The church can withhold forgiveness while the offender is excommunicated (Matt 18:18-20; cf. Matt 16:18-19; John 20:23):

The binding or loosing refers to the retention or forgiveness of the entrenched sin that has been the focus of the disciplinary process: excommunication on the part of the church signals that the offending party is still bound in sin and under church discipline. But when confession and repentance prevail and the situation is righted, the church affirms forgiveness for the entrenched sin and release from church discipline; the matter is concluded. Indeed, Jesus indicates that when the church excommunicates someone, that action of binding the offending person in sin and under church discipline has already taken place in heaven; the church ratified a preceding divine denunciation (Allison, 2012, pp. 186-87).

When church members participate in the exercise of this discipline of withholding forgiveness, “the whole assembly experiences the fear of the Lord and the gravity of sin” (Bruner, 2004, p. 228). However, even with church discipline, the goal of excommunication is restoration of the offending brother or sister through repentance. Matthew describes Jesus as friend and savior of pagans and tax collectors (Matt 12:21; 9:10). It follows, then, that excommunication should be done in love or friendship “according to the mind of Christ” (Ryle, 1993, p. 163), much like Jesus showed love to pagans and tax collectors. Furthermore, in the case of church discipline, the church’s withholding forgiveness and the lack of reconciliation are not intended to be permanent (Turner, 2008; Wilkins, 2004). As a matter of fact, Jewish people in Jesus’ day, such as the rabbinic community, Pharisees, and Essenes, applied the same principle of victims reproving their offender, although the approaches were a little different (Illian, 2010). At that time, the goal of confrontation was not expulsion, but correction, education of the offending brother, and reconciliation. The apostle Paul also disciplined an incestuous brother in the Corinthian church by excommunicating him for the sake of holiness of the whole community; as a result, he repented and was restored to the community (1 Cor 5:1-13; 2 Cor 2:5-11) (Allison, 2012).

Second, however, there is also the problem of the victim’s human forgiveness of the unrepentant brother under church discipline. We have already examined that the Christian victim as Godlike forgiver can, unilaterally, forgive anybody at any time or in any situation, including unbelievers and criminals. Therefore, it is very natural for the victim to extend forgiveness to the excommunicated offender who can be regarded as an

unbeliever, like the Gentile and tax collector (Matt 18:17). Furthermore, when one reads Matthew 18:15-20 together with the subsequent verses, the victim's unilateral and gracious forgiveness becomes very clear. Matthew 18:15-17, which describes Jesus' teaching on seeking to restore an offensive brother, resulted in Peter's question: "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" (v. 21). Jesus answered that Christians should forgive "up to seventy times seven" (v. 22). Here, in the conversation between Jesus and Peter, there is no mention about a condition for the offender to repent preceding the victim's forgiveness. Rather, the emphasis is that "for Jesus' followers forgiveness is to be unlimited. For them forgiveness is a way of life. Bearing in mind what they have been forgiven, they cannot withhold forgiveness from any who sin against them" (Morris, 1992, p. 472). Therefore, Matthew 18:15-17 needs to be understood in connection with the following passage about the victim's unlimited forgiveness. The Christian victim, imitating God (Matt 18:21-35)—who in his sovereignty offers forgiveness to anyone—is also encouraged to grant unilateral forgiveness.

However, in the case that the whole congregation decides to withhold forgiveness from the offender, the victim, as a member of the body of the church, needs to be in agreement with the church's decision. In this case the victim, who can forgive unilaterally and freely in any situation, may grant intrapersonal forgiveness to the offender only in her heart, but may be advised with regards to church discipline to withhold verbal interpersonal forgiveness, because the perpetrator avoids responsibility and shows no signs of repentance or restitution. The victim's verbal and behavioral forgiveness might, then, in fact, deprive the unrepentant perpetrator of a precious opportunity and rather condone or encourage the continuation of his sin. This time of the victim's withholding verbal forgiveness and excommunication is an important chance for the offender to address his sinful attitudes and actions and to restore mature personal agency; after all, he objected to the Lord's order to respect and apologize to the victim

and, by avoiding responsibility, did not respect himself as a personal agent who seeks to imitate God. Thus, according to the NT model of human forgiveness, Christian victims always forgive intrapersonally and unilaterally, but when the offense becomes a public matter of church discipline, they withhold verbal interpersonal forgiveness for the purpose of restoring the offender. At the same time, since the victim is no longer in charge of the offense, she might feel more freed from the original distress by being supported by the whole church. We could conclude that conditional forgiveness is only justifiable in the case of church discipline; it is a form of divine forgiveness, which is to be granted by the Christian community and by the offended person in the form of human verbal interpersonal forgiveness on the condition of repentance. So, scholars who believe that human forgiveness is conditional, seem to extend the rule of Christian communal discipline to forgiveness in all situations.

In conclusion, proponents of conditional forgiveness focus exclusively on the second stage when God's forgiveness is applied to sinners through conversion, rather than on the first stage of atonement, which Paul clearly presents as the model of human forgiveness (Eph 5:2). Also regarding human forgiveness, they focus only on the moment that the sinner repents as well as on his attitude, rather than on the moment and the manner in which the offended, as the divine or human forgiving subject, offers forgiveness. As a result, they believe that the initiative for forgiveness lies with the perpetrator and not with the victim. Thus, they confuse the whole process of forgiveness with reconciliation. The Bible, however, teaches that reconciliation is the desired end of forgiveness, while human forgiveness itself remains unconditional and unilateral.

### **The Holy Spirit's Role in Human Forgiveness**

The main reason Christian victims can extend unilateral unconditional forgiveness is the indwelling Spirit empowering them (Volf, 2006a). In the NT, the Holy Spirit assumes a central role in Christian human forgiveness. The Holy Spirit makes the



recipient of divine forgiveness a transmitter of forgiveness in interpersonal relationships (Jones, 1995). The resurrected Jesus, while breathing on them, charged his disciples with an important task: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained” (John 20:22-23). It seems that for Christians “there is thus an inextricable relation between receiving the Holy Spirit and engaging in practices of forgiveness” (Jones, 1995, p. 129). After Christ had lived a forgiving life, his Spirit took the role of guiding Christians to follow in his footsteps. The Spirit is the primary counselor of all Christians; he fills Christians with love, which is a motive and source of human forgiveness (Rom 5:5). Thus, he empowers Christians, who are willing to be conformed to the image of Christ, to forgive and reconcile with those who were previously their enemies. Williams (1982) states, “if we search for the bridge connecting our forgiven-ness with this commission to forgive, it is to be found in the presence with believers of the Spirit, given for recollection of Jesus and witness to Jesus” (p. 42). When Paul in Romans 8:26 writes that “the Spirit assists us in our weakness,” he refers to our present Spirit-flesh struggle, which includes suffering, sinfulness, as well as unforgiveness (Fee, 1996). Thus, the Holy Spirit “as the source of empowering in the midst of affliction or weakness” can empower and transform believers who struggle with unforgiveness so they become forgivers (Fee, 1996, p. 144). Because of the reality of the Spirit, for Christians human forgiveness is not only a voluntary gift but a duty as well; believers are called to forgive as God has forgiven them (Col 3:13; Eph 4:32; Mark 11:25; Matt 6:12; 18:33-35). “Indeed, the Holy Spirit is singled out as being particularly responsible for sanctification (1 Pet 1:2)” (Allison, 2012, p.117). Forgiveness is a Christian virtue developed through sanctification, that is, the process of being conformed to God (Eph 4:24, 32; 5:1-2; Col 3:10, 13). Chong (2005) states,

Forgiveness can be understood as an integral part of the journey of sanctification, as a way of life, as opposed to an event, or even a series of events. God can use forgiveness as a means of sanctification, within the souls of the offended, the offender, and in the relationship between them. Ultimately, forgiveness can be seen as a means of grace in the battle against sin. (p. 51)

Forgiveness is part of the Christians' new lifestyle, a sign of the sanctified new self. The new self exhibits Christian human forgiveness on the basis of enemy love as the habitual character of Christians as they are being transformed by the Spirit to increasingly resemble the image of God, for whom forgiveness is an eternal attribute (Arnold, 2010).

### **Conclusion**

The final form of biblical forgiveness is revealed and accomplished through Jesus Christ and has undergone a remarkable development as compared to the OT. Unlike OT conditional forgiveness, which focused merely on God and Israel, in the NT, divine forgiveness is revealed as being unilaterally prepared and offered to any and all unrepentant sinners. Furthermore, in the NT, human forgiveness is expected as an aspect of Christian sanctification, the process of being conformed to the image of Christ; Christians are to imitate God in his forgiving. The NT, therefore, offers explicit teaching on human forgiveness and the victim's role in this process, while simultaneously holding to the OT tradition that emphasizes the offender's duty to repent in order to receive forgiveness. Thus, in its full-grown form, "the need both for the offended party to forgive and for the offending party to seek forgiveness becomes paramount" in biblical forgiveness (Barton & Reimer, 1996, p.281). This development compliments the themes of repentance and forgiveness or justice and mercy in the NT. With the amazing gift of unilateral and irresistible grace embodied in Jesus Christ (Heb 1:1-3) the NT accentuates not only love for one's neighbors, but love for one's enemies as well. Through various redemptive stages then, biblical forgiveness has developed and expanded; it has not abandoned its previous OT forms, but building on the OT revelation has been transposed into its highest form as revealed through Jesus.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE APPLICATION OF BIBLICAL HUMAN FORGIVENESS

In the previous chapters, we examined biblical forgiveness—divine as well as human—and concluded that, throughout its development through various redemptive historical stages, it remained the same in essence, but was transposed into its highest form after the death of Christ. Both divine and human forgiveness in the OT were shown to be granted only on the condition that the sinner first repent. In the NT, however, God, in his justice and grace, makes possible and offers divine forgiveness mercifully and unilaterally to undeserving offenders based on Christ’s priceless payment through his death on the cross. Repentance is not a precondition for God’s provision of forgiveness and offer to forgive (Rom 5:8), but remains the condition for the sinner to obtain divine forgiveness. Analogously, reflecting the fact that God has made forgiveness available to all based on Jesus’ atonement (Eph 5:2) and his unilateral offer of forgiveness, Christian human forgiveness is given unilaterally regardless of the offender’s repentance. The offender, however, cannot obtain the experience of this forgiveness without repentance. However, neither divine nor human reconciliation can occur without repentance. Thus, we might say that in the NT the offended, whether divine or human, unconditionally initiates a demonstrative move towards reconciliation; in the case of God, this is the provision and offer of forgiveness in Christ, whereas in the case of God’s children, it is the granting of forgiveness. However, the offender and offended can be reconciled only

on the basis of the offender's repentance. In the same way that God offered forgiveness and "demonstrates His own love toward us, while we were yet sinners" (Rom 5:8), Christians, as personal agents, are to forgive their offenders though they are still unrepentant. Flowing from this biblical basis and based on the foregoing discussions, this chapter will develop a Christian model of human forgiveness, enriched by empirical research on the topic of forgiveness.

### **Basic Principles of Christian Human Forgiveness**

#### **The Subject of Human Forgiveness: the Victim as a Representative of God**

The most fundamental truth in Christian anthropology is that human beings are God's image bearers. God's ultimate design for human forgiveness will be likely an imitation of God's forgiveness. Moreover, God, as the offended party, is an example for people who are being sinned against. After all, the biblical concept of sin explains that at the core of all sin lies enmity with God and, therefore, God is the primary offended party when people sin (North, 1990; Stott, 2006). In a theocentric universe, evil cannot strike at God directly, but instead strikes at and victimizes God's creatures, his image-bearers (North, 1990). This is exemplified in Numbers 5:6-8 and in its echo of Leviticus 6:1-7, where sinners are told to bring a guilt offering to God for atonement and God's forgiveness is granted only after the sin has been confessed and restitution has been made. In the case where there is no victim or a representative of the victim to receive the restitution, God is the beneficiary of the restitution in place of the human victim. This passage emphasizes both that that restitution is crucial and that forgiveness can be offered vicariously to God, the primary offended instead of the victim.

In the NT, the emphasis shifts from the offender who is required to repent and make restitution to the offended party who is exhorted to forgive as God does in Christ. As we have seen, similar to how God, as the offended party, makes possible and offers

forgiveness unilaterally based on Jesus paying the wages of sin while standing in the place of offenders, Christian victims should seek graciously to grant forgiveness unilaterally (Volf, 2006a; Helmick & Petersen, 2001). However, practicing God-like sacrificial forgiveness is not easy nor is it natural because of the human inborn tendency to get even for the sake of justice (Matt 5:38-45). The fact that victims themselves are saved by grace can motivate them to forgive, since they too are offenders before God (Matt 18:32-33). As we saw in a previous chapter, the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18:21-35 failed to forgive, because he failed to empathize with the other servant, mindful of how he had been forgiven. Empathy appears to be one of the most important psychological qualities that enable those offended to forgive others (Worthington, 1998; Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). So Christian victims can have empathy toward their offenders by remembering the fact that they themselves have also been forgiven.

**The victim's identity: Christlikeness.** Humans are born narrators who actively construct their stories based on new information, and their own stories come to shape their identity (Angus & McLeod, 2004; McAdams, 1997; Brown & Augusta-Scott, 2006). Then, in turn, one's identity functions as "a lens through which individuals construct meaning and cognitive appraisal" (Abernathy, 2008, p. 199). When persons are victimized or traumatized, they tend to lose self-efficacy and their identity and narrative are affected and, we might say, victimized too. Consequently, victims will tend to see themselves and their world through the lens of victimization, unless they decide to forgive, an act through which their identity and story can be transformed into that of a forgiver. The victim's forgiveness of the offender is thus closely related with how she understands herself. As discussed previously, Jesus' knowledge of who he was as the God-man and the Son of God is at the center of the life he lived and the death he died as someone disposed to forgive (Phil 2:1-11; Mark 10:45; Luke 2:49; 4:18; 7:22-23; 19:10; John 14:9). The forgiveness of human sins was the reason for his incarnation (John 3:17)

and the purpose of his death (Rom 5:8) (MacArthur, 2009). Matthew 11:25-30 shows that Jesus was aware of his divine identity, his uniqueness in being the Son of God, and the intimacy that characterized that relationship (v. 27), yet he expressed his identity through humbleness and gentleness (v. 29) in his relationship with others. Despite being rejected in many cities (Matt 11:20-24), Jesus affirmed his own identity and demonstrated his humble and gentle character:

At that time Jesus said, I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in your sight. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (Matt 11:25-30)

Philippians 2:6-11 also describes how Jesus understood his identity to be equal with God and yet he chose to humble himself on the cross for the forgiveness of sinners.

God's forgiveness of offenders is supposed to transform their identity; the identities of the sinful woman (Luke 7) and the repentant and humble tax collector (Luke 18) were changed from sinful to righteous by having been forgiven (Snodgrass, 2011). Likewise, through divine forgiveness, Christians become God's children (John 1:12; Eph 1:4-5; Gal 3:26-4:7) with a heavenly citizenship (Phil 3:20) and are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13-14). The Christian's new identity is "not achieved but received" and is unchangeable, because of the unshakeable foundation of Jesus' atonement (Keller, 2016, p. 136). As Jesus' disciples, Christians are required to follow Jesus' example; they are called to live out their identity as God's children through a life of Christlike forgiveness. They are to be forgiven forgivers (Matt 18:33-35), making the church a forgiving community (Matt 16:18-19; 18:15-22; John 20:22-23; 1 Cor 5:4-5; 2 Cor 2:6-11). According to Paul, Christians are connected with other believers through union with Christ. The identity of believers is formed by virtue of their union with Christ who died and was resurrected (Rom 3:24; 1 Cor 12:12-27; 15:22; Gal 2:19-20; 3:28; Col 1:27;

2:12; 3:3). The transformation takes place by God's grace only (Snodgrass, 2011). Paul proclaimed: "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor 15:10). Only God, not themselves or others, can give Christians their true identity (1 Cor 4:3-4) (Keller, 2016). This identity is particularly Christlike (Snodgrass, 2011) and is marked by a denial of the old self (Gal 2:20; Matt 16:24; Mark 8:34; Col 3:1-17; Eph 4:17-5:20). Keller (2016) states,

The great paradox is that we "find" ourselves, this unconquerable identity and confidence, only through humbling ourselves, giving up the right to self-determination, and following Christ. "Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it" (Matt 10:39). That is, when we stop trying to find and serve ourselves and instead give ourselves in service to God and others as we put our faith in Christ, we will find ourselves. This is, of course, the path of Jesus, who had the greatest glory and honor but gave it away in order to save and serve us (Phil 2:1-11) and, as a result, now has an even greater glory and honor than before. (p. 142)

Christlike forgiveness is an important aspect of one's Christian identity (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13). Therefore, Christian soul-care needs to focus on transforming the counselee's self-story as victim into a story that defines the counselee as a forgiver by reminding the victim of her permanent identity as God's child and his grace to transform.

**The victim's forgiveness: A dutiful gift.** According to the Bible, forgiveness as a result of the offended's own free decision is a virtuous activity that can be defined as releasing the offender from the burden of responsibility (*nasa*: Lev 17:16, Num 5:31; 14:34); cancelling a debt or obligation (*Aphiēmi* or *aphesis*; Matt 6:12, 18:27; Luke 11:4); or granting a gift of grace (*charizomai*; Luke 7:21, 42; Acts 27:24; Eph 4:32; Col 3:13). Thus, forgiveness is the victim's voluntary gift as well as the virtuous act of surrendering the right to be paid back by the offender. Additionally, the NT describes human forgiveness not only as a voluntary gift but as a duty as well (Matt 18:35; Eph 4:32; Col 3:13). According to Matthew 18:32-35, forgiveness is the gracious gift of letting go of a debt as well as the duty to demonstrate divine forgiveness. In other words, Christians have the moral duty to give the offender the voluntary or virtuous gift of forgiveness.

Ephesians 4:32 and Colossian 3:13 describe both divine and human forgiveness as an act of grace with the verb *charizomai*. Human forgiveness is also featured in the list of Christian virtues together with kindness, love, tenderness, compassion, humility, gentleness and patience. Paul, thus, considers human forgiveness to be a virtue. However, in the same verses, Paul commands the daily practice of this virtue as a duty. Paradoxically, Paul sees forgiveness both as voluntary gift and duty (Bash, 2007, 2012). To understand the balance between duty and voluntary gift, it may be helpful to consider whether God's forgiveness is a duty or a gift. To begin with, God does not have a duty to forgive or save the sinners (Grudem, 2000), since he forgives people by grace (Titus 3:7; Acts 15:11). God cannot be faulted for not forgiving sinners who showed some degree of repentance, such as Achan (Josh 7:20), Saul (1 Sam 15:35), and Judas Iscariot (Matt 27:3), because God's forgiveness is based on his sovereign decision. Therefore, human forgiveness too, should be regarded fundamentally as a virtuous and gracious gift, practiced as the result of the victim's free choice.

Before the fall, there was no need for forgiveness, since humanity was sinless. After the fall, however, sin entered and God's forgiveness was needed for the continuance of human life. Now in the new covenant era, humans who are forgiven by God are supposed to forgive humans themselves (Matt 18:32-25; Eph 4:32; Col 3:13), to imitate their God. So Christian human forgiveness is primarily or fundamentally a gift and secondarily a duty, and can thus be called a dutiful gift.

**The victim's self-respect.** To be a victim implies that an offender treated an innocent person as an unworthy and despicable object (Murphy & Hampton, 1988). As a result, many victims experience high levels of shame, and a sense of powerlessness and worthlessness. The offender is the subject of the sin, the author of the evil. The innocent person is the object, the victim of the offense. Through Godlike forgiveness, however, the



victim can become a subject and author of forgiveness, thereby making the offender the object of what he or she has done, by forgiving.

Because, biblically, forgiveness is primarily a voluntary gift, it should only be granted ideally only out of a sense of personal agency, and not out of social pressure or manipulation. This is why decisions regarding when or how to forgive depend solely on the victim and not on others, such as pastoral caregivers. Others of course may encourage the victim to forgive, but they need to be careful that they are not unwittingly coercing the victim to forgive before they can do so freely. The best way to restore one's compromised personal agency is to cultivate an increasing sense of self-respect or self-worth, both of which are based on one's identity in Christ, who is the image of the divine offended. The victim is "perfectly righteous in Christ and in the Father's eyes" (Keller, 2016, p. 146). It is also important that the victim acknowledge that she has been victimized by the other's wrongdoing, rather than denying the damage that was done, in a misguided attempt to preserve her own self-worth. In this respect, Holmgren (2012) argues that the victim needs to acknowledge the offense and the degree of harm in order to preserve and restore her self-respect:

It is important for the victim of wrongdoing to acknowledge her true feelings about the incident. She is likely to have a variety of reasonable emotional responses to the incident of wrongdoing—grief over her loss, anger toward the offender, feelings of betrayal, and other emotions, depending on the circumstances. In healing from her victimization, it is important that the injured person allow herself to experience reasonable feelings of this sort. These feelings will connect her to the reality of what has happened and help her to appreciate more fully both the nature of the wrong and her own status as a person. (Exaggerated or excessive feelings, such as homicidal rage toward the offender, should clearly be regulated rather than indulged uncritically). (p. 60)

Nevertheless, because of natural human tendency of unwilling to acknowledge being victimized, some victims fail to confront their emotional response of the offence, and hurry to grant immature forgiveness. Holmgren (2012) states again,

For a variety of reasons, the victim may want to shut down her feelings and attempt to forgive her offender immediately. For example, she may feel she has a duty to forgive, or that forgiving is the Christian thing to do. She may feel that it is wrong to be angry at family members, at friends, or at anyone at all. Or on some level, if her

grief or anger is significant, forgiving the offender may seem easier than experiencing these intense emotions. However, the victim fails to respect herself sufficiently if she attempts to forgive in this manner. Not only does she treat herself in a psychologically destructive manner by shutting down her emotions, she also deceives herself about the true nature of her feelings. In order to respect herself as an autonomous moral agent, she must explore her own thoughts and feelings fully, and determine for herself how she wants to respond to the wrong. This type of forgiveness is inappropriate, then, to the extent that it is incompatible with the victim's self-respect. (pp. 60-61)

Forgiveness based on the victim's authentic motivation and emotions is connected with the victim's self-respect as a personal agent (Martens, 2013). As victims increasingly become personal agents who can explore how they are victimized, they may also become strong enough to explore their own sinful patterns, such as unforgiveness, anger, resentment, or the use of defense mechanisms, which opens up opportunities for the sanctifying mortification of sins.

However, if Christian soul-care givers too strongly emphasize forgiveness as a duty, rather than as gift, and demand that the victim forgive the offender without sufficient time to deal with the emotions resulting from the offense, the victim might produce premature or fake forgiveness. This kind of forgiveness would not be good for the victim's self-respect and "may also amount to condoning the wrong, deceiving oneself, or evading difficult tasks, rather than truly forgiving the offender" (Holmgren, 2014, p. 10). In fact, in addition to suffering from the original offense, the victim's suffering could increase, because premature forgiveness may lead to victims blaming themselves or feeling shame for having unforgiving emotions towards the perpetrator, such as anger. Researchers have found that forgiveness given before victims have had the time to deal appropriately with their anger can lead to low self-respect or servility (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Murphy, 2004; McCullough, 2000). For instance, in most societies anger in women is regarded as negative, because of the cultural myth that angry women are not nice, feminine, and mature. As a result, repressed anger can turn inward and show up as depression (Casey, 1998; Saussy, 1995). Consequently, for female victims raised in those cultures where a good woman is regarded as always being nice,

forgiving, or understanding, the forgiveness may not be a virtue but rather a sign of a lack of healthy self-respect. Koontz (2015) explains how the expression of anger may actually lead to more authentic forgiveness:

This shame is exacerbated when others in the church reinforce it by criticizing the injured persons for allowing the sun to “go down on your anger” (Eph 4:26). A cycle ripe for the growth of resentment has begun. . . . One way to break this cycle is to recognize the valid role that anger and blame play in the work of love. If injured ones can accept and value their anger as a sign of moral sensitivity rather than of moral insensitivity, and if they can recognize the cultural dynamics at work so they can identify when they feel a false sense of shame for being angry, then they will be freer to direct the energy from their anger into creative acts toward change . . . If she could find the space to share her shame, fear, and resentment with some other members of the Christian community who could hear and receive her hurt and anger, affirm her right to blame her abuser, and offer her respect and acceptance, she might gain voice, self, and a sense of empowerment that could eventually contribute to the freedom to forgive her debtor. (pp. 136-37)

Therefore, Christian soul care-givers need to facilitate the victim’s processing of negative feelings, such as anger and sadness. Such emotions are natural for image bearers to experience, because God’s primary reaction in response to sin includes anger as well. Forgiveness is a psychological process that requires time to allow the victim to mourn loss and suffering (Gen 50:1-11; Deut 21:12-13; 34:8; Judg 11:37). In fact, in doing so, the victim, as a personal agent, imitates God’s work of forgiveness; God himself would be angry for a while in the case of Israel’s serious sins (e.g., Exod 32-34), before he forgave them. In waiting on God’s forgiveness, Israel’s repentance deepened, leading to a fuller reconciliation.

Christian soul-care givers thus need to protect and increase the victim’s personal agency in order to promote the highest quality of human forgiveness. Godlike forgiveness requires Christian victims to “know what their abilities, limitations (which correlate with forgiveness activities), intrapsychic conflicts, and eventual part in the offense are” (Martens, 2013, p. 85). As a result, forgiving the offense can be a good opportunity to grow in self-knowledge and increase in conformity to the image of Christ.

**The church's identification with the victim.** Although the church as reconciling community (Eph 2:16; 2 Cor 5:18) and body of Christ (1 Cor 12; Col 1:24) should encourage the victim to forgive and the offender to repent, it should identify primarily with the victim rather than with the offender. Matthew 18:15-18 demonstrates that the church sides with the victim when it comes to interpersonal forgiveness for the purpose of reconciliation. By doing so, the church can empower the victim, who suffered psychologically and relationally, by affirming that the victim's shame is false, and by providing the victim with a sense of security in her relationships with others (Koontz, 2015). At the same time, the church, together with the victim, can encourage the offender, as God's image-bearer, to take responsibility for the wrongdoing through repentance and possibly restitution.

Unfortunately, as De Gruchy (2002) points out, the church has often sided with oppressors. Therefore, he emphasizes that "the ministry that the church must exercise to those with power (whatever the nature of that power), or their beneficiaries, must however be exercised from the perspective of those who are its victims, those who suffer and are oppressed" (p. 95). Instead of siding with the powerful or keeping silent about the evil, the church's role toward the offender should consist in seeking to restore justice.

In many churches in shame-based and community-based cultures the victim's plight has been disregarded, often with the pressure of rapid forgiveness or even a denial of the offense itself for the sake of the church's reputation. For example, in cases where the offender is a church leader, the offense has often been covered up, rather than forgiveness and discipline being practiced. Moreover, leaders may blame the victim for the offense or for giving the church a bad reputation, thereby sacrificing the victim's reputation and dignity. As a result, the victim's personal agency, which was infringed upon because of the original offense, is even more violated. Koontz (2015) describes the importance of the church's support of the victim:

When there has been abuse but pastors, parents, or other members of the Christian

community do not believe abuse has occurred, or make light of it, or do not legitimate someone's blame, the injured one is even more disempowered than had she remained silent. In cases where the injured one does not know how to say no to an offender or is unable to articulate hurt, especially in those cases in which the perpetrator does not stop the offense or does not feel morally responsible, it is doubly important for the Christian community to stand with and advocate for the injured one. Christians who walk alongside the injured should respect their psychological and spiritual healing process, exercising patience. (p. 149)

In addition, when the church or soul-care givers fail to side with the victim, forgiveness may be impeded, because the victim may begin to believe that God is on the side of the offender (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). Church members, as well as Christian offenders, may press their victims to forgive rapidly by mentioning the Christian's duty to forgive (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13) and blaming the victim for unforgiveness and anger (Eph 4:26). For example, some Christian offenders may repent (too) hastily after an offense and insist their victims forgive them immediately so as to avoid feeling remorse, without giving the victim enough time to deal with the painful consequences of the offense. However, forgiveness because of external pressure is often not genuine forgiveness offered on the basis of the victim's free decision, and the goal of biblical reconciliation is obstructed, because true forgiveness is absent. Therefore, the church should teach that offenders, as debtors, do not have the right to demand their debt be canceled, but rather that their only duty is to ask forgiveness by repenting humbly and possibly making restitution. In the same way that God's forgiveness of sinners is not natural but is a gracious gift, so the offender should show modesty by seeking forgiveness and waiting for the underserved gift, rather than demanding it by seeking to control the victim.

### **The Motive of Forgiveness: Enemy Love**

The Bible asserts that love is the motivation for God's forgiveness in Christ (1 John 4:10, John 3:16). This is also true of human forgiveness. Love should be the motive when Christians forgive others (1 Pet 4:8; Lev 19:18). In the Bible, therefore, love and forgiveness are frequently connected (Luke 7:47; John 3: 16-17; 2 Cor 2: 7-8; 1 John 4:10) (Cheong, 2005). Augustine (1999), too, understood forgiveness to be an act of love:

There is no almsdeed greater than forgiving a sin that somebody has committed against us. It is a lesser thing to be kind or even generous to a person who has done you no harm. Much greater, a sign of the most generous goodness, is to love your enemy also and to will good, and when possible to do good, to a person who wills you ill and does it if he can: when you do this you are listening to the voice of Jesus saying *Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute you* (Matt 5:44). But this is a characteristic of perfect children of God, which every one of the faithful must strive for, training his human spirit in such love by prayer to God and discipline and struggle within himself . . . (pp. 95-96)

Understanding biblical forgiveness, therefore, requires an understanding of biblical love. Jesus said that the essence of the law consists of love for God and neighbor (Mark 12: 30-31). Jesus considered enemies to be neighbors too (Matt 5: 43-44, Luke 10: 25-36). Moreover, before they were forgiven, Christians were also God's enemies (Eph 2:3), but God forgave them through Jesus' atonement because of his love (Rom 5: 8). Therefore, the basis of human forgiveness must be enemy love; Jesus' death on the cross set the standard for this kind of Christian love and forgiveness (1 John 4: 7-11; Eph 4: 32-5: 2). Volf (2007) describes the importance of enemy love as follows:

Many victims believe that they have no obligation whatsoever to love the perpetrators of wrongdoing and are inclined to think that if they were to love such perpetrators, they would betray rather than fulfill their humanity. From this perspective, to the extent that the wrongdoers are truly guilty, they should be treated as they deserve to be treated—with the strict enforcement of retributive justice. I understand the force of that position. At some level I am tempted by it. But were I to share it, I would have to give up on the most beautiful flower of our God-given humanity—the love of the enemy, love that does not exclude justice but goes beyond it. I won't argue here for this stance. I will simply assume it—though I will say enough about it to ward off a frequent misunderstanding that would confuse love with a mushy sentimentality unconcerned with the demands of justice. (p. 219)

Kierkegaard (1995) explains that only the God of love can implant love in one's heart; human beings do not have that ability. They have to presuppose love in the other, and, thus, actually build it up. Thus, for Kierkegaard (1995) Christian love is a matter of self-control and “of conscience and thus is not a matter of drives and inclination, or a matter of feeling, or a matter of intellectual calculation” (p. 143). Counseling people to forgive based on enemy love differs sharply from forgiving based on self-love, which persuades the client to forgive the assailant for her own benefit, such as physical and psychological release from the stress of unforgiveness. Unfortunately, the

latter is often taught not only in secular but also in Christian settings. For example, Christian writer Jeffress (2000) states that “probably the best reason to forgive unconditionally is the emotional and spiritual healing it brings into our lives” (p. 81) and he continues,

So often when people think about forgiveness they think about what it’s going to do for someone else. . . . What they don’t realize is that forgiveness is really an act of self-interest. We’re doing ourselves a favor because we become free to have a more peaceful life—we free ourselves from being emotional victims of others. (pp. 81-82)

In fact, many Christian counselors or psychologists are affected by the self-love motive of therapeutic forgiveness. The problem of psychological or therapeutic forgiveness, is that it works only on the inside of the soul, rather than on others or the actual relationship with others (Jamieson, 2016; Jones, 1995; Bash, 2007). Jamieson (2016) points out the self-serving psychological effect on Christianity:

In our therapeutic age, we are much like the Athenians of Acts 17. We desire a god who will heal and function as a safeguard for us. We are far less interested in one who comes, and in whose coming we are undone, even if that undoing means our salvation, our true forgiveness and acceptance. Much of contemporary Western Christianity has been well described as moralistic, therapeutic Deism. We like our God to be a healer, but only at a distance. (p. 28)

However, the fundamental motive of biblical forgiveness is not self-healing itself, but enemy-love (Matt 5:38-45; Luke 6:35-36). Even though forgiveness can lead to the victim’s experience of psychological, spiritual, social, and physical benefits, these benefits are not so much the purpose as they are the result of Christian forgiveness. However, the two goals of self-love and enemy-love are not mutually exclusive, because, biblically, love consists of caring for others, including one’s enemies (John 3:16; Luke 10:25-37), as well as caring for oneself (Kierkegaard, 1995). Wolterstorff (2011) states that the Bible describes self-love not as illegitimate, but, rather, as very natural:

The proscription of self-love is no more plausible as an interpretation of the founding texts of agapism than it is as a systematic position. Do not love only yourself, said Moses; love your neighbor as well. Treat your neighbor as your moral counterpart. The command does not enjoin us to love ourselves; it assumes that we do. It enjoins us to love the neighbor as well as loving ourselves. Had Moses or Jesus thought that self-love was illegitimate, they would have said that we are to love the neighbor instead of loving ourselves. That is not what they said; they said

that we are to love the neighbor as we love ourselves. The legitimacy of self-love is presupposed. (p. 97)

So, Jesus' exhortation to "treat others the same way you want them to treat you" (Luke 6:31) implies that the foundation for knowing how to care for others lies in the knowledge of what one knows is best for oneself. Because of this close connection between self-love and neighbor-love, the victim's lack of self-respect correlates with lack of other-respect. In other words, "if one tends to overlook offenses committed against oneself, one may tend to overlook offenses in general" (Howell, 2009, p. 20).

Further, Matthew 5:43-48 and Luke 6:27-36 assert that the foundation of enemy love is found in God's unconditional love for both the good and the bad (Carson, 2002). 'Unconditional,' however, does not mean the same as 'irresponsible'. The law of Christian love does not mean that Christians should never be angry. God's love does not exclude God's just anger. Christians should imitate both God's love and wrath. For example, sometimes the pastor's love for the saints must be expressed in the form of the rebuke of their actual sins. Augustine (1999) states,

One who uses the whip to correct somebody over whom he has power, or disciplines him in some way, and yet puts away from his heart that person's sin by which he has been hurt or offended, or prays that it may be forgiven him, is giving arms not only through forgiveness and prayer, but also in reproof and correction by some punishment, for thus he is showing mercy. (p. 95)

The Bible shows that the same love can be expressed in various ways in different situations (Carson, 2002). Indeed, God is sometimes angry, deferring forgiveness (Num 12:14, Matt 18:17) or even refusing it if necessary, even though he is a God who willingly would forgive sinners (Deut 29:20; 1 Cor 5:13). In the same way that love can be expressed in diverse forms, so biblical forgiveness can appear in various forms according to the context.

### **The Victim's Respect of the Offender**

Christian victims are required to respect not only themselves but their offenders as well, recognizing the offender as God's image-bearer. Moreover, even



though God sees humans for what they are, sinners and enemies, he loves them even so and makes them the object of his sacrificial love and potential forgiveness through Christ's death (Rom 5:8). If Christian forgiveness is characterized by love of the other, respect should be presupposed. For example, in Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus emphasizes that a Christian victim should show an offender "his fault in private" (v. 15), even though the sin could escalate and become serious enough for church discipline. This approach shows respect to the offender by preventing unnecessary humiliation (Bruner, 2004). Furthermore, Paul exhorts Christians to treat an offensive brother or sister with an attitude of gentleness and humbleness (Gal 6:1). Keller (2016) points out how respect of the offender can grow:

To forgive those who have wronged us and to treat warmly those who are deeply different from us requires a combination of two things. We need a radical humility that in no way can assert superiority over the other. We must not see ourselves as qualitatively better. But at the same time there can be no insecurity, for insecurity compels us to find fault and to demonize the other, to shore up our own sense of self. So that humility must proceed not from our own emptiness and valuelessness but from a deeply secure and confirmed sense of our own worth. Only then will I not need to think of others as worse than they are or myself as better than I am. Only then can I accept them as they are. (p. 146)

Naturally, respecting the offender is difficult. As mentioned before, a desire for revenge and "the intention to see the transgressor suffer" (Schumann & Ross 2010, p. 1193) are human because of the innate law of justice or reciprocity. According to psychologists, people are likely to exaggerate other people's wrongdoing, weak points, or the damage they receive, but they tend to overlook or reduce the harm they do to others (DiBlasio, 1998; Worthington, 1998). Jesus, of course, also called out people's tendency to arrogantly judge others (Matt 7:3-4; Luke 6:41-42). Because of this tendency, victims may regard their perpetrators as ghastly monsters (Augsburger, 1996), see themselves as superior, and feel entitled to judge the offender. Holmgren (2012) explains the process that may take place:

When we reify persons by conflating them with their actions and attitudes, we distance ourselves from them and start to view them as proper objects of anger, hatred, and opposition. As we do so, we tend to reify ourselves as well, by

conflating ourselves with virtuous attitudes. We react to the offender with horror and outrage, and in doing so we see ourselves as virtuous persons who must oppose those who are bad, or “wholly and utterly bad.” At this point, rather than being virtuous, we have become self-righteous. (p.100)

Bonhoeffer (1963) warns that “by judging others we blind ourselves to our own evil and to the grace that others are just as entitled to as we are” (p. 206). Not differentiating the offender from the offense makes it hard for the victim both to reframe her narrative and to forgive the offender. Every human being, as narrator or unique historian, tries to live up to what has already been expressed in the story plot. Until she changes her perspective, the victim will fight against the monstrous offender, who is the malicious main character in her story. McAdams (1997) asserts,

It is a truism that the historian’s understanding of the present colors the story he or she will tell about the past. When the present changes, the good historian may rewrite the past – not to distort or conceal the truth, but to find one that better reflects the past in light of what is known in the present and what can be reasonably anticipated about the future. (p. 102)

If the victim can see the offender as neighbor and as object of love and forgiveness rather than as monster, the victim’s past and future may be developed in a different and more positive direction. By separating the offense from the offender, the victim can be more objective about the offense and come to respect the offender as God’s image-bearer and as neighbor regardless of the moral failure. This separation is thus a necessary step in the process of forgiveness and is also shown in divine forgiveness where God loves and saves the sinners but hates and removes the sins. Miceli and Castelfranchi (2011) explain, from a secular perspective, how and why respecting the offender is possible:

Respecting O [offender] implies acknowledging her ability of behaving morally, and distinguishing the actor from the action (while still acknowledging her responsibility and blaming her behavior). And forgiving out of respect implies acknowledging that O [offender] is worthy of forgiveness precisely because she is endowed with such abilities, which confer basic dignity and worth on her. (p. 279)

From a biblical perspective, one’s actions, good or bad, flow from the acting subject: “The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks

from that which fills his heart” (Luke 6:45). Biblically, then, one’s actions reflect one’s character and one’s character can be evaluated according to one’s behavior. However, the Bible also sets forth the idea that one’s actions are not the sum total of one’s character; Christians, for example, are considered to be new selves, in spite of their sins, and they are called to keep growing in the image of Christ (Rom 8:29; Gal 4:19; Col 3:10; 2 Pet 3:18). Paul, for example, changed from being “a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor” (1 Tim 1:13) to being an apostle because of God’s grace (1 Tim 1:14). In other words, a perpetrator, who committed an offense in the past, can still be declared righteous by God and has the potential to be changed into a better person who can do good.

### **The Maturation of the Christian Forgiver through Sanctification**

Christian and therapeutic forgiveness can be differentiated on the basis of whether the Holy Spirit is acknowledged. Christian forgiveness cannot exist without the Holy Spirit, because the Spirit’s ministry is to produce conviction of sin, which usually precedes divine forgiveness. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit pours love into people’s hearts, which leads them to forgive (Rom 5:1-5). However, the Holy Spirit in Christian human forgiveness helps the victim to forgive; indeed, the Spirit of Christ wants to transform God’s children into becoming habitual forgivers like Jesus, the Forgiver. Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000) argue that because forgiveness is an activity of the moral self, “forgiveness therapy, at least in part, is the deliberate attempt to transform character and identity in the client by expressing goodness toward an offending person” (p. 256). Rather than producing a forgiving act, God wants to create a virtuous person, who can forgive offenders from the heart in obedience to the Holy Spirit who inspires enemy love, rather than self-serving love. This is, in fact, the antidote to indwelling sin; God’s forgiveness by grace is the solution to both actual sins as the fruit of indwelling sin and the root of indwelling sin itself. Jones (1995) explains how forgiveness is a means to a

sanctified life:

Christian forgiveness is at once an expression of a commitment to a way of life, the cruciform life of holiness in which we seek to “unlearn” sin and learn the ways of God, and a means of seeking reconciliation in the midst of particular sins, specific instances of brokenness. In its broadest context, forgiveness is the means by which God’s love moves to reconciliation in the face of sin. Hence the craft of forgiveness involves the ongoing and ever-deepening process of unlearning sin through forgiveness and learning to live in communion with the Triune God, with one another, and with the whole Creation. (p. 230)

Christian human forgiveness, such as described in Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:13, is, thus, not just an isolated activity but rather a moral virtue, which results from a sanctified character--becoming a new self that is being created by the Holy Spirit. The source of Christian forgiveness is the Spirit of God as contrasted with secular forgiveness, which is built on the love of self. The Holy Spirit is the one who empowers, motivates, and transforms the victim through and despite negative feelings such as unforgiveness, shame, anger, and a sense of unworthiness, to forgive the offender and become a better forgiver (Rom 5:5; 8:26). This ministry of the indwelling Holy Spirit (John 14:17; Rom 8:9) ought to be a great source of comfort to Christian victims.

Although there can be differences in individuals’ ability to forgive, depending on personality traits resulting from both nature and nurture (McCullough, 2000), the level of willingness to forgive reflects the Christian victim’s sanctification (Jones, 1995). One’s readiness can be developed by redirecting the desires of one’s heart with the words of God in Scripture and by yielding to the Holy Spirit (Newsom, 2012). Thus, Christian soul-care givers need to be sensitive to the victim’s overall spiritual and moral growth.

### **The Need for Reconciliation**

Because the purpose of biblical forgiveness is reconciliation (Col 1:20), Christian victims should be encouraged to go beyond intrapersonal forgiveness and work towards reconciliation with the offender. Biblically, forgiveness could be understood as unilateral and processed intrapersonally, that is, in one’s heart (Mark 11:25). The biblical ideal, however, is that it leads, to interpersonal and verbal forgiveness, that is, it is

expressed as a speech act (Matt 18:15-17; Luke 17:3-4) for the goal of reconciliation.

Marshall (2001) states,

Forgiveness is fulfilled in reconciliation. The goal of all love is to establish communion between persons, to bring people into open, trusting relationship. This is also true of forgiveness. The desire that leads to seeking or offering forgiveness is often a desire for the healing of the ruptured relationship. Even when there has been no conscious relationship between offender and victim prior to the offense, the crime itself has created a relationship, one that is ruptured at its very inception. This relationship cannot be unmade by refusing to accept that it exists. It does exist, no matter how arbitrary or uninvited its origins, and its distorted character needs to be addressed. Forgiveness deals with this distortion and clears the way for the recovery or repair of the relationship. Reconciliation thus represents the culmination of the forgiveness process (pp. 268-69)

In fact, practicing only intrapersonal forgiveness, which is often advised in secular counseling models, can be dangerous. The main purpose of forgiveness in secular counseling, which is a result of the modern culture that overly focuses on the self (Jones, 1995; Balswick et al., 2005) is not reconciliation, but emotional freedom or “psychological self-help” for the victims (Bash, 2011, p. 120). Sandage and Wiens (2001) state,

In an individualistic culture, forgiveness might frequently be construed as a pathway to self-heal from relational injuries without necessitating the communal reconciliation that is so counter to the prevailing individualistic social scripts. Forgiveness might even be framed as a unilateral method of disembedding oneself from painful relationships. (p. 203)

Many Christian counselors, such as Smedes (1996) and Jeffress (2000), also focus on the victims’ subjective experience of forgiveness, rather than on reconciliation with their wrongdoers. For example, Smedes (1996), focusing on the victim’s psychological freedom, limits forgiveness to only an intrapersonal act and disregards the verbal expression of forgiveness between the victim and the offender; he states, “forgiving is completed in the mind of the person who forgives” (p. 29) or “forgiving is a personal experience that happens inside one person at a time” (p. 35). Therefore, Jones (1995) criticizes Smedes as follows:

On Smedes’s account, therapeutic forgiveness is divorced from Christian practices and doctrine; an individual’s psychic health replaces the goal of substantive Christian community lived in faithfulness to the Triune God; sin—though not

named as such—is something others do to me (typically “despite their best intentions”) rather than a more complex reality that pervades our lives and relations as well as afflicting specific behaviors; and a false compassion without attention to repentance and culpability reflects a failure to exercise a discerning judgment oriented toward graceful reconciliation. (pp. 52-53).

Augsburger (1996) states the following about the meaning of Jesus’ forgiveness and reconciliation in first century Palestine, which was a communal society rather than an individualistic society:

In the first-century usage, “self” referred to the person as a whole, not to the core “self” of the individual which is grounded in self-esteem and actualized in the search for self-fulfillment. . . . The teaching of Jesus stands in striking contrast to such assumptions of the primacy of the individual. His instructions are guides and goads toward reconciliation. His expressed concern is not about the inner peace of the person who forgives to find release from private feelings. (p. 148)

As a result, biblical forgiveness should be understood as relational or interpersonal, ideally resulting in reconciliation, rather than a more privatized action (Jones, 1995; Bash, 2007, 2011; MacArthur, 2009; Carson, 2002). Without real dialogue, conflict, or engagement, victims may deal with an “internalized representation of wrongdoers” which may be different from who the real wrongdoers are in reality (Bash, 2007, p. 41).

Further, as mentioned before, biblically, for reconciliation to occur, the offender’s repentance is needed in addition to the victim’s forgiveness. Christian victims should confront their offenders by speaking the truth in a loving way with humility and empathy, so as to grow up in all aspects into Christ (Matt 18:15-17; Luke 17:3-4; Eph 4:15). People often keep silent about sinful situations out of a fear to offend others, but Christians have to “speak at the right time, with the right words, in the right spirit and using the right approach” (Phillips, 2002, p. 122). Christian offenders and victims are encouraged to initiate reconciliation by, respectively repenting to the victim, who serves as an agent of God (Num 5:6-8; Lev 6:1-7; Matt 5:23-24), or by forgiving and confronting offenders (Lev 19:17-18; Matt 18:15-17; Gal 6:1). Ideally, the offender’s repentance precedes the victim’s forgiveness, because the offender is a debtor who has the duty to pay back and the victim is a creditor who has the right to be paid back.

As argued before, reconciliation, which is by definition always bilateral, should be differentiated from human forgiveness, which may be unilateral. Newman (2013) states that “forgiveness admits of gradation; it is not an all-or-nothing proposition. For this reason, it is a mistake to tie forgiveness too closely to reconciliation” (p. 437). Moreover, Christians are not always called to reconcile with the offender. In Matthew 18:15-17 reconciliation cannot happen because of the offender’s unrepentance, even though the victim offers forgiveness. In addition, the victim can choose to forgive but not seek reconciliation when that would result in more harm, such as in the case of sexual abuse, untrustworthy friends, or abusive husbands. Because Christians live in a depraved world, forgivers need to be gracious, but wise as well. Forgiveness can be expressed, as Roberts (1995) points out, as “acts of forgiveness, in which one lets go of one’s anger without thereby abandoning the relevant judgments about offender and offense” (p. 289). Reconciliation can be defined as “reestablishing trust in a relationship after trust has been violated” (Worthington, 2003, p. 42), therefore, it cannot happen with people who are not trustful.

### **The Importance of Justice and Repentance**

In spite of the godly goal of reconciliation, Christian victims should not be encouraged to forgive and reconcile with their offenders too hastily with no regard for justice. Ultimately, divine forgiveness and reconciliation have been accomplished by fulfilling God’s justice on the cross. Practically, God has instilled a sense of justice in his people. Interpersonal forgiveness, therefore, does not compromise formal or legal justice (Marshall, 2001). Exodus 11:1-4 reads,

If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, he shall pay five oxen for the ox and four sheep for the sheep. . . . If what he stole is actually found alive in his possession, whether an ox or a donkey or a sheep, he shall pay double.

God made the offender responsible for accomplishing God’s justice by requiring restitution up to four or five times the original debt depending on the situation. North

(1990) argues that through the process of paying back double for the wrongdoing, the victim is restored economically and psychologically, but the offender also has a chance to be restored legally and psychologically. When offenders assume responsibility for their sin through confession and repentance, their personal agency is reestablished and they can be free from the guilt of their sin. God respected the Israelites by treating them as responsible personal agents who could receive forgiveness through confession, restitution, or atonement. Likewise, human victims can respect their offenders by giving them a chance to repent and to make restitution; “condonation does not respect the offender as a responsible, moral agent” (Cheong, 2005, p. 26).

Jones (1995) states that “repentance, like forgiveness, is not just an attitude or a feeling; it must be practiced and embodied” (p. 15). Teaching to do so, starts early, since, according to human development theory, a child tends to deal with wrongdoings by blaming others. Only mature persons can have the capacity to accept guilt, be responsible, repent and ask forgiveness (Newson & Wright, 2014). If the offender does repent, he experiences the benefit of spiritual and moral growth, because he rejected and transformed sinful habits or behaviors (Schimmel, 2002; Murphy, 2004). Following OT tradition, “just as sinners need to be restored to God, the criminal needs to be restored to his victim” (North, 1990, p. 180). Taking responsibility for the offense implies that the offender treats the victim as God’s representative with respect and humility. DiBlasio (1998) states that to respect and understand the victim, the offender needs to see himself from position of the victim:

The therapist asks the offender to summarize the hurt feelings of the victim. The offender’s identification with the victim’s suffering helps the victim not only to feel understood, but also verifies that the offender realizes the harm he or she inflicted. (p. 86)

Koontz (2015) summarizes what is involved in repentance:

1. seeing that the injured one’s feelings about what we did are true and accepting her judgment as right;
2. feeling the pain we inflicted on the offended and grieving for it;
3. acknowledging and confessing responsibility for the injury and asking for forgiveness;
4. desiring and promising not to hurt the injured one again and taking



steps to address the problems that led to injury the first time; 5. making restitution and demonstrating over time that repentance is sincere and deep. (p. 146)

Ideally, repentance ought to be done as soon as possible (Matt 5:23-26).

Furthermore, the offender ought to show responsible and genuine repentance to the greatest extent possible to offset his mistakes. If the offender's sin is committed in a social setting, for example, he has gossiped, the offender ought to confess to all those who heard the gossip the falsehood of his gossip and that he committed sin against the victim and the listeners (Adams, 1989). In the case of sin committed only in one's heart, the offender needs to confess this to God alone (Adams, 1989). Jones (2012) explains this difference as follows:

God calls us to confess to him all sins but to confess to others only our social sins, our sins that people might witness. In other words, God does not call me to confess to someone, "I am jealous of you," or "I lust sexually for you" (heart sins), but only my words or actions (social sins) that might arise from them. (p. 77)

In other words, "a general rule for confession might be that public sins, those sins that are known in a broad context, should be confessed in the same context—publicly. And private sins should be dealt with privately" (Glasscock, 2009, p. 222).

However, in spite of the necessity of the offender's repentance, repentance should not be coerced; fake repentance may result in the offender's further moral corruption (Murphy, 2004). The offender as a personal agent who is responsible for what he or she has done should decide when or how to repent to the victim. In fact, reflecting on and dealing with one's sin committed to the victim will be helpful for the offender's spiritual growth.

In spite of the importance of repentance as a Christian duty in the Bible, many Christians fail to repent to their human victims. In fact, the reason why reconciliation often does not happen is not so much that the victim does not forgive, as it is that the offender does not seek forgiveness through repentance communicated to the victim (Jones, 1995). Christianity has tended to emphasize forgiveness, with a focus on the concept of grace, at the cost of teaching the importance of repentance, which is the basis

on which forgiveness can be received. This imbalance is evidenced in the fact that there are many more books about human forgiveness than there are about relational repentance and reconciliation, despite the fact that reconciliation is an important relational goal throughout the Bible. Furthermore, many Christians tend to substitute relational repentance and restitution for repentance to God (Schimmel, 2002). Repentance and forgiveness, which was often “a communal practice” for the early Christians, is now reserved for “individualized and increasingly privatized contexts” like that between God and the sinner (Jones, 1995, p. 38). Worthington (1998) explains the reasons for this fact. Offenders are often convinced that God is more willing to forgive than their human victims; thus, they risk less humiliation or shame. There is also less need to give up their morally good and innocent self-image. Human beings tend to want to reduce the severity of their offense or describe their wrongdoing as inoffensive in order to preserve their own positive self-concept (Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). In some cases, offenders may even distort the facts so they can see themselves as the victim, rather than as the offender. Thus, they rob the victim of the right to be angry with the offender and to request an apology. As a result, they cause double damage to their victims. The offender’s sinful self-love becomes, thus, a barrier to repentance. This phenomenon often happens with shame-based offenders as compared to guilt-based offenders:

In general, shame-prone persons are more susceptible to anger, suspiciousness, blaming others, and aggressive behavior than guilt-prone persons. Revenge may also be tied to a shame-based desire to save face . . . Thus, whereas feelings of guilt often press a person toward confession and resolution, feelings of shame are more likely to prompt self-protective responses designed to hide the offense, to deflect responsibility, or to make the perpetrator appear innocent, competent, or powerful. Such responses would clearly serve as deterrents to the expression of repentance. There are at least two major areas where shame could arise for perpetrators: One centers on taking responsibility for a misdeed, while the other deals with taking on the role of a supplicant. . . . Clearly, having a damaging and willful act attributed to the self is likely to downgrade one’s public and private images, prompting feelings of shame. Shame might be especially likely to arise when a perpetrator must publicly take the stance of a supplicant, such as by apologizing, asking for forgiveness, or making reparations. People may view such acts as demeaning or humiliating, especially if the offence was serious and intentional. For persons who are highly susceptible to feelings of shame, the need to save face may be too great to warrant the risk of repenting. Perpetrators may also suspect that the victim is

vigilant for any signs of weakness and is prepared to attack them or reject their attempts at concessions. Most people would naturally be reluctant to place themselves in such a vulnerable position. Fears of showing vulnerability should be especially salient for perpetrators who have a strong motive to maintain a dominant position in the relationship, either because of personal need for power or because they believe—accurately or not—that the other party will attack if given the opportunity. (McCullough et. al, 2001, pp. 142-43)

Sadly, many a small group meeting or a prayer meeting has become a place where perpetrators change into victim clothes. However, the unrepentant offender who might be able to deceive himself or others cannot avoid the judgement of God, who is on the victim's side and will avenge the wrongdoing (Rom 12:19; Heb 10:30; Ps 58:10-11). God's righteous judgement of the offender's and his unrepentant sin can mean comfort and freedom to the victim. Maier (2017) states,

If the offender will not repent and make things right, the burden of justice is shifted to the ultimate Judge who reserves vengeance for Himself. Knowing that evil will one day be judged and destroyed allows the victim to legitimately counter the hostile messages sent to her by the offender's non-repentance. Someone above them both will render a verdict and His judgment will stand, as God promises in Romans 12:19: "I will repay." (p. 80)

Christians should keep in mind repentance is essential and that it precedes becoming a forgiver. The church is a community of repentance, a gathering of those who have repented and are repenting of their sin, and, consequently, it is a community of forgiveness. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1963) argues,

Cheap grace is not the kind of forgiveness of sin which frees us from the toils of sin. Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate. (p. 47)

Thus, forgiveness and repentance together are ongoing signs of a true Christian style of life. Christianity, therefore, needs to emphasize both forgiveness and repentance in a balanced manner.

### **Dynamics of Unforgiveness**

In spite of the Bible's explicit teaching on gracious human forgiveness reflecting the sacrificial love of Jesus' atonement (Eph 4:32-5:2; Col 3:12-14), many

Christian victims do not forgive, because they are not totally free from the effects of indwelling sin and are in an ongoing process of sanctification. The OT narratives on human forgiveness show that victims, such as Esau, Joseph, and David found forgiving to be difficult, because of painful memories (Gen 41:51) and revengeful desires (Gen 32:6; 1 Sam 25:21-22). For example, Joseph, who by many Christian scholars is regarded as exemplary in his Christlike forgiveness, must have experienced periods of unforgiveness, because of the pain he endured from his family. He tried to forget those painful memories by naming his first son ‘Manasseh,’ meaning forgetting (Gen 41:51). McConville (2013) describes Joseph’s struggle in deciding how to deal with his brothers, his offenders:

At their first encounter in Egypt, although Joseph decides immediately on disguise and on a plan to bring Benjamin to him, he seems to hesitate about how to go about it. His first thought is to imprison all the brothers except one, who would be sent on the mission to bring Benjamin—hence the three-day incarceration. But by the third day he has reversed this, keeping only one behind and sending the rest home with the grain. Many interpret the imprisonment according to Joseph’s well-conceived plan. Yet equally, it may be a moment when he contemplates revenge but thinks better of it and decides upon a strategy of full reconciliation. The gap is massive at this point, because of what we know transpired between these men. The pause created by the three-day imprisonment of the ten creates a space for us to contemplate Joseph’s possible ruminations. (p. 641)

Thus, it is important to admit that unforgiveness is a natural reaction of human beings in the face of wrongdoing; The Bible gives much evidence that suffering caused by others is a given. Think, for example, about Abel (Gen 4:10), Joseph (Gen 41:51), Hannah (1 Sam 1:6) and Jesus Christ (Mark 15:34). The imprecatory and lament psalms describe the natural human reaction of psychological or physical distress of a believer in unforgiveness, such as hatred, despair, loneliness, longing for destruction of the evildoer, or desiring justice with harsh, honest, and even violent expressions (Hankle, 2010; Maier, 2017). Those psalmists did not ask for the will or ability to forgive their enemies. Their attitude was not one of politeness or gentility (Jones, 2007); rather they express brutal anger, despair, resentment, and a desire of revenge.

## **Symptoms of Unforgiveness**

We are relational beings since we are made in the image of God who is relational in nature. Unforgiveness causes serious pain, because it adds to relational brokenness. The desire to escape this pain may be one reason why victims choose to forgive (Worthington, 2006; Helmick & Petersen, 2001). Worthington (2003) explains that unforgiveness is not so much an immediate reaction, as it is a slowly developed reaction which grows in a soul through vengeful rumination, that is, “mentally replaying the transgression” (p. 31). He defines unforgiveness as “delayed negative emotions, involving resentment, bitterness, hostility, hatred, residual anger and residual fear, which motivate people to reduce the negative emotions” (p. 33). Unforgiveness reactivates the same offensive event repetitively in the brain (Worthington, 1998, p. 119). This rumination may or may not be controlled by the victim; “if rumination occurs mostly under people’s control, its power is decreased. But if rumination occurs spontaneously and cannot be stopped, then the negative emotions aroused are higher” (Worthington, 2006, p. 46). Research shows that unforgiving victims experience stress that is similar to the stress that results from a variety of other stressors, involving all levels of being, such as biological, psychosocial, ethical, and spiritual (Pargament, 1997; Worthington, 1998, 2006).

**Physical problems.** The poet of Psalm 31 suffered from malicious gossip (vv. 13, 18, 20), and became alienated from his community (v. 11). He speaks of physical pain: “my eye is wasted away from grief, my soul and my body also. . . . My strength has failed because of my iniquity, and my body has wasted away” (Ps 31:9-10). Likewise, the stress of unforgiveness can result in various physical problems, while forgiveness brings overall physical benefits (Worthington, 2006; McCullough, 2000; Edmondson, Lawler, Jobe, Younger, Piferi, & Jones, 2005). Stress has been found to be a potential cause of all sorts of diseases, such as cancer, heart disease, headache, and gastrointestinal problems,

because the body's functioning is compromised by the strong tension, weakening the immune system. Research shows that painful events, such as traumas, are biochemically fixed in the brain, leading to changes in the hormones, brain functions, and structures. Brains of unforgiving victims show the same pattern as those of patients experiencing stress. For example, their hormonal patterns are "consistent with hormonal patterns from negative emotions associated with stress" (Worthington, 2006, p. 63). Unforgiving victims tend to have lower levels of the neurotransmitter serotonin, which can cause depression, grief, or aggression. Also, whenever they are reminded of the stressful event, their blood pressure increases. These negative changes in the foundational biological mechanisms naturally affect the other, higher, levels of functioning. Vice versa, malfunctioning of these higher levels, for example in the psychological and interpersonal realm, can create additional stress, which further weakens neurobiological structures (Bremner, 2002; Worthington, 2006).

**Painful memories.** As we have already examined, the great OT forger, Joseph, suffered from painful memories because of his brothers' offense (Gen 41:51). Further, Jacob's mother was aware of the time it might take for Esau to forget or maybe forgive his brother's offense, and suggested Jacob flee until this would happen (Gen 27:45). Likewise, most victims go through repetitive pain by ruminating on the tragic wrongdoing of others. In fact, one's memory is a very important aspect of one's self, which is the psychological foundation of a personal agent that includes the individual's identity, self-esteem, and self-capacity (McCann, 1990). Without the function of memory, people cannot know who they are. Memories can protect; the memory of a traumatic event serves the human instinct to avoid similar offences and offenders in the future (McNally, 2003). Although memory has a protective function, it is often also the source of great emotional pain. Worthington (2003) explains,

We are literally hard-wired to remember serious hurts or offenses. . . . the hurt is burned into our brain. It becomes part of our wiring. The sight of the person's face,

the sound of his or her voice, images of the acts of harm, the angry and fearful emotions of our immediate reaction, and the memories of subsequent events are recorded. It isn't really like storing a program in a computer; it's more like changing the circuitry of the computer. The biochemistry of our brain changes. Neurotransmitters, the chemicals that are released into the space between neurons to create pathways for memories, are coded to be released when we are reminded of a hurtful event. Electrical and chemical signals in our brain run a familiar route. They move through the emotional centers of our brain, not merely through the cortex. In fact, sometimes we have only a feeling of pain and can't remember why. At other times, we have a memory complete with attached emotions. (pp. 133-34)

Rumination of the painful memories can add to an unforgiving attitude, because it triggers unforgiving emotions, motives, and behaviors (Worthington, 1998, 2003, 2006). For example, the anger of a person who ruminates over an offense event is triggered by these very thoughts, and, consequently, increases. Further, in many cases, the offense is exacerbated in the victim's memory, leading to an increasingly negative appraisal of offense (McCullough et al., 2001; Worthington, 2006). Worthington (2006) explains the causes of rumination as follows:

Many external triggers can set off a ruminative sequence. These could include the mere sight of the transgressor, reminders of the transgression, being hurt similarly (by the person or even by someone else), or even being under a lot of stress. Internal triggers can set off rumination, too. When people get in negative moods, they tend to ruminate, even in the absence of external triggers. Memories or intrusive images sometimes seem to pop up spontaneously. Once an emotion-loaded memory of a transgression occurs, a train of thought might lead to rehearsing other grudges. When thoughts are triggered, negative emotions like anger and unforgiveness usually are not far behind. (pp. 47-48)

Further, those relational negative stimuli promote the secretion of cortisol, which compromises the function of the hippocampus, which is related to memory function. However, the victim's most common reaction to painful memories is the defensive mechanism of avoidance, which "is typified by attempts to distance, deny, apply selective attention, disengage from, and minimize the importance of the stressful event" (Maltby, Macaskill & Gillett, 2007, p. 557). For example, some victims of child sexual abuse do not have any memories of the abuse because of the mechanism of repression (Blume, 1990). So "repressed memories, which lay at the root of diverse psychological problems, needed to be remembered, emotionally processed, and cast into narrative form"(McNally, 2003, p. 6). The reason is that avoidance or repression depletes

the victim of emotional energy (Freud, 1955), making it even harder to find healing through forgiveness.

**Negative emotions.** Unforgiving victims may experience various negative emotions, such as anger, fear, shame, and grief. At the root of those emotions is the fact that one holds (on to) a grudge, and preserves the victim role, which is an embracing of “suffering, weakness, and distress as part of one’s identity” (Worthington, 1998, p. 98).

Anger is the primary emotion that signifies the unforgiveness that accompanies a grudge. Anger can also lead to negative behaviors, including scorn or contempt for the offender. Anger, or resentment, however, is also an important emotion associated with self-worth or self-respect, because of the human sense of justice (Murphy, 2004). Murphy states,

Wrongdoing is in part a communicative act, an act that gives out a degrading or insulting message to the victim, the message “I count and you do not, and I may thus use you as a mere thing.” Resentment of the wrongdoer is one way that a victim may evince, emotionally, that he or she does not endorse this degrading message; and this is how resentment may be tied to the virtue of self-respect. (p. 77)

To experience anger in the face of an offense is natural; God himself responds with just wrath with regard to sin. Many victims in the OT, such as David, who was treated disrespectfully (1 Sam 25:22) or Esau, who was deceived by his brother (Gen 27:41-45; 32:6), show that they experienced severe anger accompanied by a desire for revenge. A psalmist expressed his resentment in the form of a poem with rather harsh expressions: “Before your pots can feel the fire of thorns he will sweep them away with a whirlwind, the green and the burning alike. The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance; He will wash his feet in the blood of the wicked (Ps 58:9-10). Griswold (2007) argues that anger is, in fact, to some degree, a requirement in the process of forgiveness:

If one felt no resentment in response to someone’s injurious action against oneself, it would make no sense to forgive them for their deed. . . . It is possible to be unjustly treated and not feel the corresponding resentment, of course; but one is then either very much above common life (say, because one is a Sage), or insensible for



any number of other reasons (say, because one is self-deceived, or emotionally blocked for some psychological or cultural reason) . . . whatever one is doing in overlooking the injury and feeling no anger toward the offender, it is not forgiveness. (p. 40)

Reducing the offense, defending the offender because of a strong desire that the victim reconcile with the offender, or blaming the victim's anger may result in fake forgiveness and a weakening of the personal agency of the victim. Men may find it easier to express anger, because they are socialized to express anger. Soul care-givers in forgiveness counseling, however, also need to focus on the emotion of fear, especially in female clients, because many women are socialized to suppress anger and tend to show fear instead of anger (Saussy, 1995). When the victim recovers proper self-respect and self-trust, it is time let go off the anger (Griswold, 2007). Helpful in this process is for victims to first experience proper empathetic care in response to the wrongdoing and respect of their emotions.

Shame, “the sense of public scrutiny and concomitant embarrassment” (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000, p. 71) is expected of the offender who ought to repent. However, it is also a very common emotion that victims experience. Being a victim, because of unjust treatment, likely leads to feelings of humiliation or degradation. For example, victims in the Bible, such as Hannah who was humiliated by her rival Peninah (1 Sam 1; 2:1-10) and several psalmists (Pss 25:2, 20; 44:15-16; 19:19-20) experienced shame because of an offense. In fact, victims of incest, divorce, abuse, or layoff develop shame, adding to the pain of the primary offense (Cheong, 2005; Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). Shame, which is related to feelings of insignificance, weakness, and inferiority, can compromise the victim's self-confidence or pride. Research shows that unlike guilt, which is the sense of moral wrongdoing, shame, the sense of moral self-deficiency, is harder to treat. Furthermore, shame-based persons tend to find it harder to forgive than guilt-based persons (Cheong, 2005; Patton, 1985). Patton (1985) states that shame is the most fundamental emotion of the fallen human being estranged from God and it is experienced whenever human relationships are broken. However, in many cases, shame

is expressed as anger or depression, because admitting to feeling shameful means admitting inferiority. Withholding forgiveness, then, may give a sense of being powerful and superior (McCullough et al., 2001). In this way, the victim defends herself or himself against the adverse feeling of shame. As a result, shame becomes the primary reason of unforgiveness.

**Behavioral symptoms.** As discussed, rumination can lead to an increase of unforgiving emotions, such as anger, fear, and anxiety. These negative emotions can trigger “associative, cognitive, motivational, and emotional networks” that will arouse negative motives and behaviors (Worthington, 2006, p. 44); verbal or physical fights, hatred, retribution, and even murder may be the result. However, victims themselves may be affected most by unforgiveness, because the repetitive habitual reaction to the transgression can become a part of one’s personality and character (Worthington, 2006). Victims may experience the negative consequences in a variety of ways, for example, they may have difficulty relating to others; they may be faced with lower chances of success and happiness; and they have a possibility of becoming passive, and decreasing in problem-solving abilities and perseverance by being “more passive, slower, and more willing to give up as soon as they encountered difficulties” (Worthington, 1998, p. 99).

### **Reasons for Unforgiveness**

Generally, forgiving is more difficult “when offences are severe, intentional, and repeated, and when perpetrators are unrepentant” (McCullough et al., 2001, p. 144). Also, the nature of the offense or the offender adds to the ease or difficulty with which people may forgive. For example, forgiving one’s two-year-old child’s misbehavior falls in a different category than forgiving one’s spouse’s verbal abuse. And forgiving strangers who stole one’s car would be easier than forgiving one’s best friend who defrauded one of a big amount of money. Thus, the maturity level of offenders, the victim’s expectations, and relational closeness are examples of variants in the process of

forgiveness. Now we will examine the most common reasons why victims do not forgive their offenders.

First, as discussed, the human hardwired tendency for revenge often moves victims to avoid forgiveness. This principle exists in many cultures and serves to preserve human societies (McCullough et al., 2001). Although it is true that revenge can temporarily produce satisfaction and reduce tension, “only forgiveness can eventually make the object nonthreatening and bring about permanent tension reduction” (Cioni, 2007, p. 386).

A second reason is explained through the concept of the injustice gap, which is the difference “between the way a victim would like to see a transgression resolved and the way the victim currently perceives the situation” (Worthington, 2013, p. 133). For example, if the offender continues his offensive ways, the injustice gap will widen, making forgiveness more difficult. Unfortunately, many offenders refuse to admit the harm they did, blame the victim, justify their offense, or take away the right of the victim to be angry by becoming angry at the victim (Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2011; Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). Reducing the gap is critical for forgiveness and can happen in two ways. The offender’s humbling attitude can narrow the gap; he might make apologies, suffer visibly from what he has done, express his humiliation over his transgression, or seek to make restitution (Worthington, 2003, 2013; Murphy & Hampton, 1988; Fehr & Gelfand, 2010; Martens, 2013; Luzombe & Dean, 2008). In this respect, God requires people to apologize and make restitution to the victim as soon as possible (Num 5:5-8; Matt 5:23-24). Another way to reduce the gap is for the victim to lower expectations about the ideal result or to give up the desire to retaliate or to harm the offender (Worthington, 2006; Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2011).

A third reason for unforgiveness is that victims themselves may have become unforgiving persons because of early life experiences, as well as biological precursors (Worthington, 2006). Some people are born with a sensitivity to stressful stimuli. Others

may be repetitively exposed to various offensive environments and have learned to react with unforgiveness. This may lead to character traits, such as anger, resentment, fear, vengeful rumination, hatred, shame or guilt-proneness, neuroticism, narcissism, and strong pride leading to dispositional unforgiveness (Worthington, 2006). Characteristic of such an unforgiving person is that she is “a hardhearted and vindictive person, or suffers from low self-esteem and ‘needs’ the resentment in order to prop herself up” (Griswold, 2007, p. 70).

Further, negative mental representations, which are internalized images through past repetitive experiences of interactions, can be a very important barrier of forgiving others (Gurman & Messer, 1997). According to Kernberg (1993), “libidinally or aggressively determined affective states constitute the primary motive for internalization” (p. 76). Especially our “early interactions give rise to mental representations that shape subsequent beliefs, feelings, and behavior” (Gurman & Messer, 1997, p. 61). For example, a man with an internalized image of a rejecting and angry mother, may project these representations onto his female boss. If his boss were to sin against him, this projection will make forgiveness much more difficult, because this man may need to forgive his angry mother before he can objectively see and forgive his boss. Taking revenge rather than forgiving may be a victim’s attempt to destroy the negative internalized image, and may, furthermore, result in self-destruction, “since every object is an internalized part of self” (Cioni, 2007, p. 392). Retaliation may bring temporary and limited relief from tension or negative emotions; however, only forgiveness can bring the victim true freedom and salvation from self-destruction. Cioni (2007) states,

The image representing the violator, when forgiven, no longer has the power to arouse tension-inducing bodily states. A freer, peaceful condition can follow because an end to the repetitive cycle of object-directed anger and discharge has been attained through the more permanent decathetic properties of forgiveness (p. 390).

Fourth, fear that the offender might continue harmful behavior after the victim

has offered forgiveness, is another factor in unforgiveness. Though some people generally have trouble trusting others (McCullough et al., 2001), this fear can be based in reality, for example in the case of repetitive domestic violence, and should be treated carefully. For instance, a battered wife may have to forgive internally and silently only (cf. Mark 11:25). This kind of interpersonal forgiveness is wiser than offering explicit forgiveness designed for reconciliation (Matt 18:15-17; Luke 17:3-4), which may lead to further abuse (McCullough et al., 2001; Worthington, 1998).

Fifth, the seriousness of the offense adds to an unwillingness to forgive (Fritz & Omdahl, 2006). Worthington (1998) points out that the degree of the perceived hurt, the intentionality of the offense, the number of hurts, the objective or subjective nature of the hurt, and the perceived level of hurtfulness can be factors that determine the seriousness of the offense. For example, serious and intentional offenses, such as sexual abuse and murder, are much harder to forgive (Martens, 2013). Jesus was well aware that it is much harder to forgive an offender who sins repetitively (Luke 17:4; Matt 18:21-22). Nevertheless, he commands forgiveness, regardless.

Sixth, victims may actually gain from staying in the position of a victim; they will have a sense of being in a morally high position, experience justification through holding a grudge, gain a sense of personal power, or cherish others' attention and support. McCullough et al. (2001) state,

People who label themselves as victims can also justify ongoing feelings of anger and righteous indignation—emotions that can make them feel powerful. Finally, being seen as a victim may also be an effective tool for eliciting support and empathy from others, benefits that will be lost if victim status is relinquished. In fact, people with a character style of moral masochism may regularly portray themselves as victims in order to gain such rewards. To forgive is to relinquish the victim role and the rewards that go with it. As such, it is hardly surprising that some people will find it very difficult to extend forgiveness. (p. 147)

However, the Bible teaches that God's people should be willing forgivers, instead of letting resentment grow and not forgive (Mark 11:25; Matt 18:21-22; Luke 17:4).

## **The Practice of Forgiveness**

When humans are hurt by others, unforgiveness or a desire to retaliate are in part natural, because of the God-created desire for justice (Murphy, 2004; McCullough et al., 2001; cf. Exod 21:24). Unforgiveness, however, can also be one of the vicious characteristic of our fallen selves (2 Tim 3:3). For Christians, then, forgiveness is a denial of their old self; it is a difficult and painful practice, because it is a rejection of one's inborn fallenness. Psychologically, however, forgiveness also brings healing because it relieves the stress of unforgiveness and counters the energy involved in seeking justice or revenge, trying to avoid the offender, or excusing the offense (Worthington, 2003, 2006). Most people go through a period of unforgiveness and do not immediately forgive their offender, but gradually the unforgiveness motive is replaced by forgiving emotions (McCullough et al., 2001). Because forgiveness usually is a gradual process, both unforgiving and forgiving emotions can coexist within the same victim (Greer, 2013). This implies that there can be many different levels, forms, and statuses of forgiveness.

### **Various Forms of Forgiveness**

Biblically forgiveness is always unilateral, reflecting only the stance of the offended, that is the forgiver. In the process, however, the victim can express forgiveness in various forms. This is due to the two-dimensional nature of forgiveness, and the many relational contexts between offender and victim that may be the backdrop of the offense.

First, we have already examined that the Bible describes two dimensions of forgiveness: nonverbal or intrapersonal—that is, the internal cognitive and emotional forgiveness within the victim's heart (Mark 11:25)—and verbal or interpersonal forgiveness—that is the external social and behavioral forgiving action from the victim towards the offender (Matt 18:15-17; Luke 17:3-4). The former can be made unilaterally as the victim willfully chooses to obey God. In some cases this internal forgiveness is sufficient, for example, when the offender does not know he or she hurt the victim and

the relationship seems uncompromised externally, or when the offense is not serious. The only condition is that it comes from the victim's heart (Matt 18:35), which is the essence of true Christian forgiveness. However, ideally, this intrapersonal forgiveness is expressed as a speech-act in verbal forgiveness. The victim communicates this to the offender for the purpose of restoration of the broken relationship (Briggs, 2001). The victim's words 'I forgive you' are a performative utterance, where according to Miceli & Castelfranchi (2011),

the sentence is not just a description of what one wants, believes or does, but is used for actually doing what is uttered; that is, the issuing of the utterance coincides with the performing of an action (as in "I promise"). Once this action has been performed, important behavioral consequences occur for the victim, the offender, their relationship, and the community at large. (p. 264)

Psychologists describe two dimensions of forgiveness as follows:

Intrapsychic forgiveness has two steps: one in which the victim begins to forgive, and a second in which the forgiveness is more or less fully achieved and the victim no longer feels anger or resentment. Interpersonal forgiveness does not, however, normally recognize two steps, but instead focuses on the single act of expressing forgiveness. (Worthington, 1998, p. 88)

Second, forgiveness takes place in various contexts. Interpersonal forgiveness in the relationship between parent and child may have to happen sooner rather than later, even without dealing fully with the deeper emotions of forgiveness (Worthington, 1998). On the contrary, it may be wise for an abused wife, although she is willing to grant intrapersonal forgiveness to her abusive husband, to decide to withhold interpersonal forgiveness until the husband shows signs of genuine repentance and transformation. Thus, there can be different degrees and levels of forgiveness, from superficial and immature to deep and mature (Martens, 2013). Depending on the relationship with his offenders, God himself also forgives in various ways. God forgave David, who committed more serious sins than Saul, who apparently was not forgiven by God (at least no forgiveness was recorded in the Bible). Also, God treated the sins of Israel more seriously than those of other nations, such as Nineveh. It might just be common sense that "we forgive strangers and acquaintances differently than we do loved ones who

violate a trust” (Worthington, 2006, p. 17). Thus, according to the offender’s context, Christian forgiveness may vary.

### **The Victim’s Preparation for Forgiveness**

#### **Promoting forgiveness through the victim’s own memory of repentance.**

To become a genuine forgiver, the victim should first be a genuine repenter, since the Christian virtue of forgiveness is based on the experience of being forgiven through repentance. As we observed in the previous chapter, Jesus reminded the unforgiving, arrogant, and apathetic servant of his own experience of being forgiven by God: “Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?” (Matt 18:3). According to Jesus, the victim’s own memory of being forgiven through repentance should result in empathy and enable a humble identification with the offender. We have already observed that Christ, as the perfect model of Christian forgiveness, demonstrates perfect empathy and humility by becoming an obedient servant to sinful men (Phil 2: 5-8). Likewise, Christian victims identify with the position of their offenders and are, thus, motivated to show empathy and humility, two important factors for genuine human forgiveness (Enright, 2001; Worthington, 2009; Volf, 2006a). These virtues, which are a means to understand and stand with the offender, are possible when victims remember that they, themselves are also sinners in need of repentance. In other words, the key to victims’ experience and expression of empathy and humility lies in the familiarity with their own process of repentance. Knowing how to repent well leads to knowing how to forgive well. Not having the willingness to forgive “is essentially unrepentance (Matt 18:23-35)” (*ISBE*, p. 1133), whereas a forgiving spirit evidences one’s own practice of repentance (Matt 18:23-35). According to NT teaching on human forgiveness, the one who is forgiven by God will be a Godlike forgiver (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13; Matt 18:23-35) and the one who forgives others will be forgiven by God (Matt 6:12; Luke 11:4; Matt 18:23-35). Spurgeon (1885) describes the beauty of both receiving



and extending forgiveness as follows:

To be forgiven is such sweetness that honey is tasteless in comparison with it; but yet there is one thing sweeter still, and that is to forgive. As it is more blessed to give than to receive, so to forgive rises a stage higher in experience than to be forgiven. To be forgiven is, as it were, the root; to forgive is the flower. That divine Spirit, who bears witness with our spirit when he breathes peace into us because we are pardoned, beareth yet a higher witness with us when he enables us truly to pardon all manner of trespasses against ourselves. (pp. 287-88).

Biblically, the reception of forgiveness, whether divine or human, entails repentance and, thus, the one who has received divine forgiveness must have repented genuinely. Consequently, the genuine repenter will also tend to be a genuine forgiver and the genuine forgiver will tend to be a genuine repenter. The OT emphasis on the sinner's duty of repentance could serve to prepare for the NT emphasis on the victim's duty of human forgiveness. The experience of seeking forgiveness oneself—both divine and human forgiveness—through repentance is vitally important in order to be able, as victim, to empathize and identify in humility with an offender and for the subsequent process of forgiveness. This is a process that reflects Jesus' identification with sinners through his incarnation, baptism, and death (Phil 2:5-8). Seeking human forgiveness may be more difficult than seeking divine forgiveness, because of a belief that God is more merciful than human beings. Repenting before others may also lead to feelings of inner resistance, shame, fear, and avoidance. The humble victim is aware of and respects these challenges for the offender.

**Accepting the Truth about the Offense.** An important step in the process of forgiving is to be honest about the reality of the offense. When God forgives or punishes people, he tells them clearly how they have sinned; for example, God confronted Adam and Eve with the fact that they broke his commandment (Gen 3:9-14). Before people repent, God labels them sinners (Rom 5:8) or enemies (Rom 5:10). Therefore, as Griswold (2007) states, "Truth telling is one of the ideals underpinning both forgiveness and apology" (p. xxiv). When Christians prepare to forgive, they need to recall and

confront themselves with the injury they suffered, even though this may be painful, because it implies being faced with anger, shame, defense mechanisms, and rumination. As mentioned before, victims, therefore, may be tempted to forget, repress, excuse, or condone the offense rather than accept it. However, forgetting or justifying the offense is not the same as forgiving it, since forgiving implies a wrong and what can be excused, condoned, or justified does not need forgiving. Victims who let go of anger or a desire to retaliate for fear of experiencing negative consequences of anger, getting a bad reputation, or feeling shame over not being able to forgive, do not actually forgive but condone the offense, the evil. For example, putting up with one's boss's offense out of a fear of losing one's job condones the boss's wrongdoing because of circumstantial pressure (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). Marshall (2001) explains that acknowledgement of the wrong is both ethical and justice upholding:

Forgiveness is not an excusing of wrong. To forgive wrongdoing is not the same thing as tolerating or minimizing evil, nor is it an evasion of moral responsibility or a denial of justice. The opposite is the case, for forgiveness requires mutual agreement that the deed done was morally wrong, as well as materially and emotionally hurtful, and that the wrongdoer is responsible for and remorseful about what has happened, and is committed to putting things right. Forgiveness, in other words, demands ethical seriousness. It enthrones rather than dethrones justice; it exposes rather than excuses wrong. (p. 271)

In other words, "genuine forgiveness cannot even begin to be considered until one recognizes the pain and consequences of the injury" (Worthington, 1998, p. 141). Thus, one of the primary steps in the process of forgiveness is to be confronted with the painful truth about the offense.

**Expressing negative emotions to God.** An essential element in the process of forgiveness consists of the honest expression of negative emotions to God. However, many pastoral care-givers tend to give quick answers to victims or attempt to change the victims' perspective of the offense so as to quickly make them feel better. Consciously or subconsciously, counselors may send messages to the victim that negative emotions, such as anger and lament, do not reflect a life of faith (Jones, 2007). The victim's guilt may be

exacerbated, because of the explicit teaching on the Christian duty of Godlike forgiveness, leading the victim to bypass any negative emotions by quickly moving to forgiveness. Schaefer (2001) points out that “for the devout and believing people, there is always the risk of allowing the rhetoric of forgiveness to conceal the dark areas of unforgiveness that lurks deep in their lives” (p. xlii).

However, as we have already examined in chapter two, the OT seems to imply that the victim’s expression of negative emotions is a very important aspect of humanity when combined with faith in God, who is the only judge over all creation (Gen 18:25; Pss 7:8; 9:8; 94:2; 96:13; Job 34:23; Eccl 12:14; Ezek 30:14). The OT evidences that the Israelites did not deny, but rather faced negative emotions that were the result of their suffering. In fact, the whole history of Israel is the story of her cry to God in the midst of suffering and God’s hearing of this cry; “At the beginning of the primeval history, one encounters the crying and hearing of Abel’s blood (Gen 4:10); at the end of salvation history, the prophet Isaiah envisions the cessation of the cry (Isa 65:19)” (Boyce, 1988, p. 1). The passionate petitions or complaints in the face of oppression, slander, and persecution, as well as the desire for vengeance are signs of faith rather than of unfaith (Glenn, 1996; Jones, 2007). The lament and imprecatory psalms are an excellent example of the Israelites’ forthright expression of negative emotions. The fact that these psalms outnumber other psalms, such as thanksgiving and praise psalms, as well as the fact that they were used in worship show that God desires to hear the victim’s honest expression of negative emotions. Thus, they can be considered a necessary process to psychological and spiritual healing (Hankle, 2010; Schaefer, 2001). Glenn (1996) states,

The psalmists who wrote the lament psalms were unhappy with God, but they did not walk away from him. Instead, they risked their relationship with God, and even risked their lives, in order to engage him. The psalmists were upset with their situation, with God or with other people; and they took their problems to the only one they knew could do anything about their circumstances. They felt that their relationship with God was important enough for them to be vulnerable. They had invested in this relationship and felt that God had betrayed them. Because of their faith in God, the only possible way to express their problems was to question God. (p. 18)

Even the most forgiving victim (Luke 23:34), Jesus, quoted Psalm 22 (cf. Mark 15:34), a lament psalm at his greatest moment of suffering. In Psalm 22 “the poet feels abandoned by God, ambushed from without and within, and suddenly he or she imagines that God is an ally of the adversary” (Schaefer, 2001, p. 55). Even for Jesus, forgiveness does not exclude the honest emotional expression of his suffering.

Thus, in the preparatory stage of forgiveness, victims need to be encouraged to honestly express negative feelings before God, which can be done through questioning God and asking him to execute justice. Maier (2017) states,

Addressing justice also validates what the victim suspects: the problem is with the actions of the offender, not the victim’s inability to forgive. When victims realize not only that justice is coming but that it is fully legitimate to pray for that day, their hearts are freed up to heal. Justice becomes the responsibility of the most righteous, all-knowing, and all-powerful Judge in the universe who can never be bought off, lose their file, or make a mistake. This frees victims to focus on their own healing without the pressure to prematurely forgive. (p. 96)

When the offended client prays (with) the lament or imprecatory psalms, she may experience many unforgiving emotions, such as anger, shame, and hatred. And “this is a very good therapeutic act as it keeps the negative emotion from having no voice remaining in the psyche of the client” (Hankle, 2010, p. 278).

However, this process needs to be recognized for what it is; namely, part of and preparation for forgiveness, rather than an end in itself or an excuse for not being able to move towards forgiveness. After all, the developed revelation of forgiveness in the NT exhorts Christian victims to forgive unilaterally and without limit (Matt 18:22), imitating God (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13). The development of this redemptive view of forgiveness can be visualized as a spiral form in which the outermost circle of the NT is the final form that fulfills all past and inner forms of the OT. Just as the revelation of forgiveness developed from an OT emphasis on repentance and justice to a NT focus on forgiveness, so believers should certainly move forward from a partial and preparatory step in the process of forgiveness towards full human forgiveness. No Christian victim is justified to stay in unforgiving emotions. The purpose is to reach a stage of an honestly

processed and genuine desire and readiness to forgive.

### **The Process of Forgiveness**

The fact that most of the lament and imprecatory psalms in the OT end with faith in and praise of God, who is the perfect Judge, implies the victim's psychological and spiritual development. The same growth in maturity is expected from Christians in the NT when they are exhorted to forgive their enemies graciously. Thus, the journey of Christian victims goes from facing and expressing the hurt to the journey's destination of forgiving the offender like God. However, the Bible does not describe every detail on the road to forgiveness. According to Holmgren (2012), "healing from victimization is a complex and multifaceted task, and may be quite idiosyncratic" (p. 59). Therefore, the process of forgiveness presented in what follows needs to be regarded as an approximate pattern for most victims.

**Beginning stage: Decisional forgiveness.** According to Jesus, Christians should forgive as many times as their offenders come to repent (Luke 17:4) up to seventy-seven times (Matt 18:22), which, in fact, means without limit (Blomberg, 2006). Jesus wanted his followers to be habitual forgivers. The disciples, realizing the near impossibility of this task, ask the Lord to increase their faith (Luke 17:4-5). Christian forgiveness is a work that begins with faith in God. The sort of intrapersonal forgiveness that is being asked for (cf. Mark 11:25) is usually initially not a total forgiveness, that is, one that includes complete emotional forgiveness. It starts out mainly as an act of the will, which has been called decisional forgiveness, which is, to some degree, partial and superficial. Decisional forgiveness, however, can develop into a more complete form of forgiveness. Some scholars believe that the decision to forgive should be regarded as "only a small slice of forgiveness" (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000, p. 78). This is because emotional forgiveness, which is dynamically intertwined with decisional forgiveness, is a process that takes more time, whereas cognition and behavior are more easily controlled

through one's willpower. However, DiBlasio (1998), points out that this does not mean that decisional and emotional forgiveness always happen separately, with the first leading to the latter; in some cases, full—decisional and emotional—forgiveness might happen at once:

I have worked with many cases where, in my opinion, lasting and true forgiveness was granted in a day. For example, much instantaneous forgiveness and reconciliation occur at the beds of dying patients. When emotions are elevated or the need is critical, people seem to show the capacity to forgive quickly. With this in mind, I define forgiveness in such a way that makes it possible for people to have cognitive control over whether to forgive. (p. 78)

Decisional forgiveness refers to the victim's choice to forgive by behaving more positively towards the offender, primarily as a cognitive work in faith at the higher spiritual and ethical levels. So "people may decide to grant decisional forgiveness not because they rationally believe that forgiveness matches their motivation, but because forgiveness might be consistent with their belief system" (Worthington, 2006, p. 56). Despite the fact that decisional forgiveness has not reached its fullest expression at all levels, it is genuine forgiveness as long as the decision is made in one's heart as an act of obedience to God's commandment regarding enemy love and forgiveness (Matt 5:38-48; Mark 11:25; Luke 6:27-36). The heart, as discussed, is the center of a person (Matt 18:35) and includes every aspect of one's inner life, such as the will (Acts 11:23; Rom 2:5), emotions (Rom 1:24; Heb 10:22), the mind (Luke 24:25; Rom 1:21), and one's conscience (1 John 3:20) (BDAG). Thus, granting decisional forgiveness to show moral superiority, to avoid the offender's future attack, or because of being pressured to forgive, cannot be considered genuine forgiveness.

Some OT revelation regarding divine forgiveness legitimates the temporal process often involved in human forgiveness since total decisional, behavioral, and emotional forgiveness can sometime take a while to achieve. As discussed before, when God forgave the Israelites for their idolatrous worship of the golden calf, Moses had to pray and persuade God four times, before full forgiveness, reconciliation, and the renewal

of covenant were reached (Exod 31-32; 32:11-13; 33:12-18; 34:8-9). In response to Moses' first prayer, God withdrew his burning wrath; after the second prayer, his forgiveness progressed further with the promise of an angelic figure; the third prayer moved God himself to dwell and journey with the Israelites; and after the last prayer the covenant between God and Israel was renewed. Decisional forgiveness, then, may seem superficial, but it is crucial, because it is the seed of holistic mature forgiveness and may eventually lead to reconciliation.

In fact, decisional forgiveness, as the seed of mature forgiveness, is a virtue because it requires a deliberate virtuous act of the will. According to Roberts (1995), "The virtues of will power (courage, perseverance, self-control) are powers to act, feel, and think well despite the urges, desires, emotions, and habits which tend to undermine proper action, feeling, and thought" (p. 289). Thus, decisional forgiveness is the initial phase of laying a foundation for a future, more developed form of forgiveness. The victim may not yet be ready to have positive cognitions, behaviors, and emotions towards the offender, but an important step is made by beginning to eradicate thoughts and behaviors of revenge, resentment, and bitterness (Lev 19:18; Deut 32:35; Matt 5:44; Luke 6:27, 35; Rom 12:19; Heb 10:30) and giving up a victim mentality. Thus, in this stage, unforgiving rumination will need to be stopped as it is the root of bitterness and of the desire to retaliate, and because it can stimulate associative networks, or "combinations of related mental and physical activities" which will motivate unforgiving actions (Worthington, 2006, p. 47). Also in this stage, the victim may need to give up demanding that the offender pay back, apologize, or make restitution. In this respect, decisional forgiveness is a Christian virtue of a person who wills to obey God's word rather than give in to one's desire to get revenge or to remain unforgiving, ruminating over the harm done.

**Intermediate stage: Cognitive and behavioral changes.** The OT shows that divine forgiveness is often granted with God's promise of 'forgetting the sin' (Isa 43:25; 44:21-22) and, conversely, God's unforgiveness illustrates his remembrance of the sin (Ps 109:14-15). A similar process may be recognized with human victims: Esau's unforgiveness came with anger (Gen 27:44-45), a grudge and a plan to kill Jacob (Gen 27:41), and the memory of the offense, but Esau's forgetting the offense might be an indicator of his forgiveness (Gen 27:45). Thus, this OT aspect points out that, biblically, forgiveness refers to the memory of the offended and to the desirability of the human victim to make a partial cognitive change in regard to the offender (Murphy and Hampton, 1988). God in his omniscience obviously cannot forget anything, so this is an example of anthropomorphism. However, it teaches us that God's perfection entails the ability to disregard the heinousness of sin and treat forgiven sinners from a new perspective. However, human beings do not have that same ability, since they cannot erase from their memory the painful suffering that results from an offense. Instead, they can change their reaction towards the offender, moving from unforgiveness to forgiveness. Once the victim grants decisional forgiveness by willfully relinquishing resentment, revenge, or other negative emotions, he or she may be ready for the next stage, in which the victim's forgiveness deepens into a more full-grown emotional forgiveness, consisting of more positive and forgiving cognitions and behaviors toward the offender.

First in this process, victims may need to change their understanding of the offender. The victim's memory of the offense may need to be reconstructed or reinterpreted (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). Over time and through their experiences, people accumulate, reconstruct, and internalize stories related to the self to form an identity (Angus & McLeod, 2004; McAdams, 1997; Volf, 2006b). According to cognitive theory, emotion is believed to be the result of cognitive interpretations of objects and situations (Elliott, 2006). This means that for unforgiving emotions to be



transformed, a change in the victim's memory should be presupposed. Volf (2007) points out the possibility of past traumatic memories coloring the perception of subsequent events:

If I remembered my interrogations as a window into the brute power that rules the world, would I have remembered rightly? Or would I have remembered wrongly by first focusing on the negative and then allowing it to color the whole surrounding landscape? Would I be allowing the abuse to whirl me down into the dark netherworld, the memory of abuse having darkened my world, and the darkened world having made me remember the abuse even more negatively? (p. 221)

Milbank (2003), quoting Jankelevitch, discusses how forgiveness can change cognitions about past events:

It is not that forgiveness nihilistically pretends to obliterate past evidence, but rather than this past existence is itself preserved, developed and altered through re-narration. In this re-narration one comes to understand why oneself or others made errors, in terms of the delusions that arose through mistaking lesser goods for the greater. (p. 53)

Thus, in this stage, rather than trying to exaggerate the offense or hold on to the victim status, the victim needs to humbly empathize with the offender (Zechmeister & Romero, 2002; Worthington, 2003). Also, "once forgivers see the offender as a person who has suffered, they are able to imagine what the offender went through and how the offender felt" (Enright, 2001, p. 158). However, the victim's cognitive reconstruction of the offender does not mean the truth about the offender's sin is ignored nor is it done just to feel better about the offender. Maier (2017) points out how this can become problematic:

If this kind of reality reconstruction is done enough, the victim learns to mistrust her own appraisals of people and situations. When her internal radar is always being ignored or the data supplied by her radar is constantly being corrected, eventually she will begin to wonder if she can ever see things close to how they really are. This could lead to an unhealthy dependence on others to define and interpret reality for her, which in the long run only makes her more vulnerable to future abuse, not less. It is as if her early warning system has been dismantled due to poor performance. (pp. 37-38)

Only when Christians acknowledge the offender's sin as sin, in the same way God does, can they truly forgive. So, Christian soul-care givers should help victims re-narrate the story of the offense based on reality, which implies that the need to acquire enough and

accurate information about the offender and the offense is important. For example, what was the offender's early life like? Did the victim in some way contribute to the offender's offense? Or was the offender pressured into doing the wrong? The more accurate information that is available and the more accurate the empathy is that the victim displays, the easier it is to forgive (DiBlasio, 1998). Empirically, it has been proven that a self-serving person tends to be more unforgiving than an other-directed person who tends to be more forgiving and able to understand the offender's stance and emotions. Certain "facilitative emotions" are believed to enable forgiving emotions, such as empathy, compassion, love, "gratitude, humility, contrition, and hope" (Worthington, 2006, p. 78). Seeking to remind oneself of one's own sins and one's experience of being forgiven by God and others is a way to evoke these facilitative emotions, which may lead to emotional forgiveness and the hope of the offender's repentance and reconciliation. Worthington (2003) suggests specific ways for the victim to empathize with the offender: namely, to write a letter, make a recording, or do a role play in which the offender repents and do so from the perspective of the offender. Victims need to know, however, that the information about the offender never condones the offense, but is mainly a way to help understand the offender (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). In this way, victims begin to reconstruct their story to include forgiveness in Christ, rather than continue to develop and exacerbate the painful story of victimization.

Second, the victim needs to seek to change his or her behavior towards the offender. People seek harmony in the relationship between their cognitions, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. If there is cognitive dissonance, that is, inconsistency between those aspects, people may experience discomfort or anxiety (Festinger, 1957). If the victim is in an emotionally unforgiving state and decides to be intentional in showing positive and forgiving behavior towards the offender, an inconsistency between behavior and emotion is created, which may lead to the victim trying to reduce the internal dissonance and harmony by seeking to induce forgiving emotions. Worthington (2006)

states,

If a person has made a decision to change his or her behavioral intentions, it is likely that he or she will report lowered revenge, avoidance, and grudge-holding motivations. The decisional forgiver's behavior is also likely to change if he or she is brought back into contact with the offender. To the extent that a forgiver is able to control his or her behavior in line with his or her behavioral intentions, behavior will indeed change as one of the sequelae of making the decision to forgive. . . . The person who has decided to forgive might act more benevolently. When that happens, the forgiver sees himself or herself behaving with forgiveness while still feeling unforgiveness. This creates a dissonance, which leads the forgiver to change his or her emotional experience. (p. 57)

Thus, though emotions may lead to certain behaviors, in this case, particular behaviors may evoke certain emotions. In other words, one's behavior can be a precursor to one's emotions. For example, when an angry person sees his own angry behavior his anger may actually increase. The victim's behaviors can, thus, take a critical role in promoting emotional forgiveness. Public words and actions of forgiveness can also contribute to emotional forgiveness, because it shows that the proclamation of the victim's forgiveness is genuine (Worthington, 2003). The victim should, then also, refrain from blaming or judging, but describe or treat the offender positively.

Worthington (2003) suggests some strategies to deepen forgiveness in this way:

Erect the "forms" of forgiveness. Decondition yourself to the person by systematically recalling hurtful events without the attached emotion. Symbolize your forgiveness through using the First stone, burning an account of the transgression, washing your hands of judgment, crossing out unforgiveness or otherwise using a meaningful symbolic act. Write about your forgiveness in a certificate, letter, poem, song or journal entry. Tell someone your trust, even if it is only yourself. Also tell the Lord, who loves you and wants to know that you forgive from your heart. (p. 143)

The result of this stage is thus a deepening of the forgiveness through positive cognitive and behavioral changes. However, even following the completion of these stages, victims may still have unforgiving emotions. Something else is needed, namely, emotional forgiveness.

**Completed stage: Emotional forgiveness.** The final stage for Christian victim is the completed stage of emotional forgiveness. When Paul commanded forgiveness and

love as aspects of being Christlike (Eph 4:32-5:2), he must have described emotional forgiveness: “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Eph 4:32). In this verse, Godlike forgiveness is mentioned side by side with the emotions of kindness and compassion. Williams (2003) states,

If Christlikeness is our goal as His followers, that would include not only Christlike behavior and thoughts, but also Christlike emotions as well. The Holy Spirit brings fruit into the life of the believer which is riddled with emotions – love, joy, peace, kindness, gentleness – which make us more like Christ. (p. 58)

While victims can, to some degree, control and change their thoughts and behaviors toward the offender through decisional forgiveness and the subsequent deepening development, they may need more time to replace the negative emotions with neutral or positive emotions, such as empathy, compassion, or love (Worthington, 2003, 2006). The latter is the purpose of the stage of emotional forgiveness. The Bible presupposes that Christians can and should regulate their emotions. Kim-van Daalen (2013) states,

Having the ability to control one’s emotions is commended by Scripture as a very important trait (Prov 16:32). The fact that the Bible commands certain emotions (Neh 9:17; 1 Pet 3:9; 1 Cor 13:7; Phil 2:3; Col 3:12; Phil 4:6; 1 Thess 5:18; Phil 4:4; 1 Thess 5:16), and puts restraints on others (Prov 14:29; 16:18; Eccl 7:9; Phil 4:6; Col 3:5; Jas 1:19) implies that people have a created ability to do so. Intense anger may be appropriate, but often it turns out destructive and sinful, hence, the exhortation to control anger so that it does not lead to sin (Eph 4:26-27). Grief is an appropriate emotion in many cases, but there is an encouragement to moderate the kind of grief that is due to the loss of a beloved based on the hope that is found in God (1 Thess 4:13). When people are able, at the biological level, to regulate emotions they can both cultivate good emotions and deal appropriately with sinful emotions, that is, mortify or transform them. (p. 46)

Worthington (2006) states, “Once the person believes that he or she should act on the changed intentions and control his or her behaviors, the decisional forgiver typically wants to bring his or her emotions in line with that decision” (p. 57).

Worthington (2003) explains how emotional replacement can take place:

Our hurtful memories are not really wiped out. We almost never really forget serious hurts or offenses. We remember them differently after we forgive. Hate, bitterness and resentment are replaced with positive thoughts and feelings. The memory of the hurt remains, but is associated with different emotions. When we completely forgive, amity is substituted for enmity. There are two ways to eliminate

unforgiveness. First, you can chip away at it by replacing a little unforgiveness with a little forgiveness in hundreds of experiences. Second, you can whack unforgiveness with a giant dose of empathy, sympathy, compassion or love and simply overwhelm it. (p. 42)

Because “emotions are embodied experiences” (Helmick & Petersen, 2001, p. 165), there is a chance that the negatively conditioned circuit in the brain is reactivated, even after emotional forgiveness has taken place. This may happen when victims are faced with a similar offense or when they meet their offender again, leading to the experience of similar unforgiving emotions. As a result, victims may believe they have not truly forgiven. However, negative emotions associated with the offense may resurface, to some extent, because human beings are holistic psychosomatic beings and, therefore, stressful situations, for example, may call to mind emotions that were experienced surrounding the offense. When this happens, Worthington (1998, 2003) suggests to hold on to forgiveness. If the victim has shared the process of forgiveness with others, they may be helpful in reminding the victim that she has indeed forgiven the offender.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have examined how biblical teaching about divine and human forgiveness can be applied to the Christian life. We have also considered how empirical research on human forgiveness can enhance our understanding and implementation of the biblical teaching. God’s expressed desire is reconciliation with all humans (Col 1:20; 2 Pet 3:9) and Christian forgiveness and reconciliation should be considered in this context. Christian victims, as personal agents, are to grant forgiveness unconditionally to offenders who are God’s image bearers. Furthermore, offenders receive forgiveness on the condition that they seek forgiveness through genuine repentance. The Bible calls for God’s children to demonstrate both repentance and forgiveness, justice and love, confidence and humility. Christians should be habitually clothed with the virtue of forgiveness as they live out their identity as God’s children

(Col 3:3; John 1:12) and reflect Jesus, the Lord of lords (Rev 19:16) who, knowing he was equal with God, became a humble and gentle habitual forgiver. In this way Christians can forgive their offenders from the heart (Matt 18: 35), because they understand and practice enemy love. The process of forgiveness may take time, because of the multiple levels of personhood, but once the small seed of decisional forgiveness has been planted, it has the potential to grow into full and complete emotional forgiveness (Jas 1:14-15; Luke 6:45).

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

This chapter forms a conclusion to the previous chapters. As mentioned at the beginning of this dissertation, the purpose of this study is to propose a comprehensive model of biblical human forgiveness through a redemptive-historical lens. According to this model, forgiveness includes two essential aspects; namely, the victim's *unconditional grant of forgiveness* and the offender's *conditional attainment of forgiveness* after repentance. Biblical forgiveness, unilaterally granted by the offended, can be expressed in various forms.

From a redemptive-historical perspective, the OT's emphasis on the offender's conditional attainment of forgiveness and the NT's focus on the unconditional granting of forgiveness are both marks of the Christian life. In the OT, the Israelites, as responsible personal agents for their behaviors, were exhorted to seek forgiveness through repentance. This idea continues into the NT, where God's people, in addition, are called to extend forgiveness as Christlike merciful personal agents. In the OT, the focus was on the Israelites as forgiven people of God. In the NT, Christians are said to be the forgiven as well the forgiving people of God. Development of God's revelation in redemptive history gives rise to this additional focus. North (1990) states,

The New Testament gives Christians greater revelation and assigns us far more responsibility than was the case in the Old Covenant era. Christ's resurrection is behind us. The Holy Spirit has come. It could be argued, of course, that because greater mercy has been shown to us, we should extend greater mercy. With respect to the judicial principle of victim's rights, I quite agree. The victim should be more

merciful, so long as his mercy does not subsidize further evil. (p. 20)

The purpose of the remainder of this conclusion is to examine how the local church can help its members to be both responsible and merciful personal agents in their ongoing practice of a life that includes repentance and forgiveness.

### **Practice of Christlike Forgiveness in the Church**

As became clear in the previous chapters, the church is a forgiving community made up of forgiven people. In other words, because Christians are forgiven by God, they should be forgiving like Jesus Christ (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13). God created the world and his people to be connected and in communion with one another. They were meant to reflect his relational being. However, since the fall, history gives evidence of alienation from God, from other human beings, and from God's creation (Gen 3:12-21). "Sin is presented as the quintessence of self-centeredness and selfishness. It separates man from society and continually reinforces this social division by 'possessing' the sinner, and taking him away from the community" (Taylor, 1971, p. 187). In this respect, divine forgiveness through Jesus Christ, which is the model to follow according to the final revelation of God's forgiveness, "aims to restore us to communion with God, with one another, and with the whole creation" (Jones, 2000, p. 123). In fact, when one receives the divine gift of God's forgiveness through Jesus' atonement, one becomes part of the body of Christ, the church, which is the covenantal relationship with God, and is, thus, connected organically with other members of Christ's body (Eph 4:12; 1 Cor 12:27) (Allison, 2012; Jones, 1995). Because of this organic relationship (1 Cor 12:12-27), the divine forgiveness that was received does not only have a, personal, but also communal impact. In this respect, Jones (1995) states,

Our forgiveness is not a gift that we receive as isolated individuals; it is a gift from the Spirit that is irreducibly particular in terms of the narratives of our pasts, yet that gift calls us into communion. (p. 173)

Jean-Pierre Fortin (2016) quoting Bonhoeffer states as follows:

The church is the human community renewed and living in, from, and for Christ; the organized and differentiated body drawing energy from and bringing Christ's saving grace



to historical manifestation. Christ saves by bringing human beings into communion with God. Christ summons and empowers human beings to be involved in the construction of the ecclesial body by letting them have a share in his vicarious mode of existence and action. (p. 16)

The whole church as the body of Christ (Col 1:24; 1 Cor 12:12-27), as well as her individual members, are called to reflect Christ, who is the perfect image of God (Col 1:15). The more forgiving the individual member is, the more forgiving the community becomes, and vice versa. The more sanctified an individual, and hence, the church, becomes, the more purely Jesus Christ is reflected (Bonhoeffer, 2009).

Further, Christlike forgiveness is one of the most important markers of conformation to the image of Christ (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13). Particularly in their practice of forgiveness, the individual Christian and the Christian community reflect Jesus Christ, who was and is a merciful habitual forgiver. Murray (2009) highlights a life of forgiveness as essential to being conformed to Christ in his book, *Like Christ*:

Beloved followers of Jesus! called to manifest His likeness to the world, learn that as forgiveness of your sins was one of the first things Jesus did for you, forgiveness of others is one of the first that you can do for Him. And remember that to the new heart there is a joy even sweeter than that of being forgiven; even the joy of forgiving others. The joy of being forgiven is only that of a sinner and of earth: the joy of forgiving is Christ's own joy, the joy of heaven. Oh, come and see that it is nothing less than the work that Christ Himself does, and the joy with which He Himself is satisfied that thou art called to participate in. ([http://swartzentrover.com/cotor/E-Books/christ/Murray/LikeChrist/LC\\_19.htm](http://swartzentrover.com/cotor/E-Books/christ/Murray/LikeChrist/LC_19.htm))

Because of the strong interaction between humanity and its community (Martin, Sugarman & Thompson, 2003), the focus in this chapter will be on the church as a Christlike forgiving community. The influence of the social environment on humans is widely accepted. For example, psychologist Carl Rogers strongly believed that when the environment provides opportunities for the individual to satisfy basic needs, growth naturally occurs (Rogers, 1951). The Bible, too, implies that environment is crucial in human development. The creation story in Genesis, where God is described to create people after he had prepared all things as a stage for them, seems to suggest that all things in the universe are a necessary provision for humanity. Both created by God, humankind and the creation itself are interconnected (Col. 1:16). Thus, humans affect culture or bring about changes in the communal environment, and the culture

reflects and affects human beings (Martin, Sugarman & Thompson, 2003). In this respect, it was natural for God to redeem the Israelites by taking them out of the sinful community of Egyptians who treated them as slaves, which had a powerful impact on their humanity.

Therefore, when the church presents Christians with a forgiving environment, her members will increasingly be formed into forgiving individuals. Thus, what strategies can the church employ to create a community that, in its practice of seeking and granting forgiveness, reflects Christ, who is the embodiment of forgiveness?

### **Christian Ethics for Forgiveness Education in the Church**

Jesus taught his disciples the Lord's prayer in Matthew 6:9-13, which highlights the most basic needs of Jesus' followers. First, the need of a God-centered life is mentioned, relating to God's name (v. 9) and his kingdom (v. 10). Then the needs of daily living are prayed for, such as food (v. 11), forgiveness (v. 12), and protection from temptation (v. 13). It follows that, just as food is essential for physical wellbeing and God's protection from temptation for spiritual wellbeing, so forgiveness is essential for one's identity and social wellbeing. The importance of forgiveness becomes even clearer when, right after this prayer, Jesus, once again, emphasizes the Christian's duty to forgive: "For if you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions" (Matt 6: 14-15). This seems to imply that to practice forgiveness, Christians need to intentionally remind themselves of God's forgiveness, which is the foundation for why they should forgive their offenders. Practicing forgiveness is only possible when Christians continually bring to mind that they are sinners, just like their offenders are, and that, because God forgave their sins, so should they pardon their offenders.

Forgiving others can be difficult, but several truths can help Christians follow this path. First, Christians have to realize a paradoxical truth. In and of themselves, Christians do not have the ability to forgive. However, God commands Christians to forgive, which implies, they can in fact do so. The solution to this paradox lies in the reality of the Holy Spirit, who enables

Christians through their union with Christ. Murray states,

And if it still appear too hard and too high, remember that this will only be as long as we consult the natural heart. A sinful nature has no taste for this joy, and never can attain it. But in union with Christ we can do it: He who abides in Him walks even as He walked. If you have surrendered yourself to follow Christ in everything, then He will by His Holy Spirit enable you to do this too. Ere ever you come into temptation, accustom yourself to fix your gaze on Jesus, in the heavenly beauty of His forgiving love as your example: “Beholding the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory.” ([http://swartzentrover.com/cotor/E-Books/christ/Murray/LikeChrist/LC\\_19.htm](http://swartzentrover.com/cotor/E-Books/christ/Murray/LikeChrist/LC_19.htm))

The Holy Spirit gives divine power through union with Christ. Christians should ask the Holy Spirit to pour forgiving love into their hearts (Rom 5:5) (Cheong, 2005). This loving power flows from the love of God, who himself is love (1 John 4:8; 1 John 4:20-21). Forgiveness should be understood in light of God’s commandment to love one’s neighbor and even one’s enemy, which is a virtue that is humanly impossible (Matt 5:38-48; Luke 6:27-36). In fact, “God commands love for He enables the human heart to love according to His created design, as His own Spirit of love works in and through His children” (Cheong, 2005, p. 88). Love is the root of all Christian virtues, including the virtue of Godlike forgiveness (Cheong, 2005; Carson, 2002; Murray, 2009). So, Christians who desire to forgive their offenders like Christ, need to depend on love from God. Thus, whenever Christians are offended, they should acknowledge that they themselves do not have the ability to forgive their enemies, but by depending on God, who is love and the source of Godlike forgiveness (1John 4:8, 16; 20; Eph 4:32-5:1), they will be able to extend forgiveness. Murray (2009) writes,

Every time you pray or thank God for forgiveness, make the vow that to the glory of His name you will manifest the same forgiving love to all around you. Before ever there is a question of forgiveness of others, let your heart be filled with love to Christ, love to the brethren, and love to enemies: a heart full of love finds it blessed to forgive. Let, in each little circumstance of daily life when the temptation not to forgive might arise, the opportunity be joyfully welcomed to show how truly you live in God’s forgiving love, how glad you are to let its beautiful light shine through you on others, and how blessed a privilege you feel it to be thus too to bear the image of your beloved Lord. ([http://swartzentrover.com/cotor/E-Books/christ/Murray/LikeChrist/LC\\_19.htm](http://swartzentrover.com/cotor/E-Books/christ/Murray/LikeChrist/LC_19.htm))

Therefore, to help church members mature in practicing Christlike forgiveness, the local church needs to emphasize the truth that Christians can forgive like Christ, not in their own strength, but through divine enabling.

Second, Christlike forgiveness, based on enemy-love (Matt 5:38-48; Luke 6:27-36), requires self-denial. This truth flows from the life of Christ who is the prototype of a life characterized by self-denial (Rom 15:3a), with his atoning death for the forgiveness of sin as ultimate self-denying sacrifice (Eph 5:2; Heb 12:2). Murray describes how Christ did not live to please himself:

Even Christ pleased not Himself: He bore the reproaches, with which men reproached and dishonored God, so patiently, that He might glorify God and save man. Christ pleased not Himself: with reference both to God and man, this word is the key of His life. In this, too, His life is our rule and example; we who are strong ought not to please ourselves. ([http://swartzentover.com/cotor/E-Books/christ/Murray/LikeChrist/LC\\_07.htm](http://swartzentover.com/cotor/E-Books/christ/Murray/LikeChrist/LC_07.htm))

Not only is Christ the example, he actually calls his followers to this kind of life:

If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake, he is the one who will save it. (Luke 9:23-24; cf. Matt 16:24-25)

In this passage, Jesus implies that the first obstacle Christians experience in following Jesus is their self. Further, Jesus commands that Christians should follow him rather themselves.

Bonhoeffer (1963) states that “to deny oneself is to be aware only of Christ and no more of self, to see only him who goes before” (p. 97). Jesus says that this life equals taking up one’s cross daily (Luke 9:23). The cross should be understood “not simply as an object of faith, but as a principle of life, as the badge of discipleship, as an experience” (Pink, 2005, p. 159). In this process of self-denial, that is, the daily practice of self-crucifixion for Jesus’ sake, Christians lose their old self and develop the new self (Dowd, 2015). Rather than engaging in a few good deeds, self-denial ought to be a propensity of the Christian’s heart. As already mentioned, the old self does not want to turn the other cheek to the one who slaps the one cheek or to give even more to the one who has forced him to do something (Matt 5:38-48; Luke 6:27-36). However, the indwelling Spirit of God mortifies the desires of revenge and unforgiveness (Rom 8:13) and gives the will and the power to love and forgive (Phil 2:13) (Owen, 1965). À Brakel (2011) writes as follows:

The believer—uniting himself by faith with Christ and through Christ with God—takes hold of His strength as his own. By reason of this received strength, [he] is active in mortifying sin within him. God is thus the original cause: man, having been affected by this

power, is himself active in the casting out of sinful self-love and its consequences, as well as in purifying and adorning himself with the contrary virtue.  
([www.chapellibrary.org/files/7513/7658/4068/sdenfg.pdf](http://www.chapellibrary.org/files/7513/7658/4068/sdenfg.pdf))

Thus, because of love for God, the Christian victim should deny the voice of the old self, which calls for revenge, self-righteousness, anger, and unforgiveness. She will mature as she intentionally realizes her own sinfulness, her suffering, and her emotions, and, powerfully, chooses to live from the new self. However, many Christians compromise their sanctification as they emphasize their weakness and justify their failure in self-denial by claiming that self-denial is virtually impossible. However, à Brakel encourages Christians to train themselves in practice:

Once this virtue has become deeply rooted, the person who practices self-denial will have much inner peace. He will not so readily be enticed to entertain ulterior motives or be envious, wrathful, and guilty of misuse of words—all of which frequently issue forth in a rash manner due to self-love and a seeking of self . . . All that he does renders him pleasant to all—before God and before men.  
([www.chapellibrary.org/files/7513/7658/4068/sdenfg.pdf](http://www.chapellibrary.org/files/7513/7658/4068/sdenfg.pdf))

Therefore, practicing self-denial, in this case the denial of one's propensity not to forgive, is an important aspect of the sanctification process and will help grow and mature the virtue of forgiveness.

Third, Christians should learn to see that moments of being sinned against are opportunities to embody Christlike forgiveness. Ironically, Christians can only be Christlike forgivers when they are the victim of an offense. The fact that, in the Bible, forgiveness is discussed as a habitual practice, like the daily dependence on food (Matt 6:11-12), implies that being sinned against is unavoidable in the Christian life. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Jesus, the most humiliated victim, prayed: "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Like Jesus, Christians are called to be merciful and to be habitual forgivers when they are sinned against. Learning to be a forgiver presupposes being offended and humiliated. So Christian soul-care givers need to teach Christians to be Christlike forgivers by preparing themselves to be ready when they encounter humiliation and suffering, and to see those situations as opportunities to mature in forgiveness. Fourth, the quality of forgiveness and the extent of the damage are proportional. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the victim, as a personal agent, should not avoid or minimize an offense, but acknowledge it in all its severity and

impact. If the victim does not acknowledge being victimized, there is no need of forgiveness, and if the victim minimizes the offense, her forgiveness will be minimized. Kendall (2009) warns of the danger of minimization as follows:

Minimization allows the heart wound to take root and grow into something more deadly than the initial offense: bitterness. Minimization blocks your ability to see the offense as it really is and to forgive freely. (p. 17)

Denying or minimizing the offense is unnecessary, because God did not deny or minimize Jesus' death on the cross. God's forgiveness (Rom 5:8-10) through Christ's crucifixion is a display of the very manifestation of the wickedness of sin by showing that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23). In other words, the reason that the cross can reveal God's amazing forgiveness is that it reveals the horrors of sin perfectly. Flavel (1836) argues,

The more deep and tender our resentments of wrongs and injuries are, the more excellent is our forgiveness of them; so that a forgiving spirit doth not exclude sense of injuries, but the sense of injuries graces the forgiveness of them. (p. 299)

Thus, Christian victims, who are called to the dutiful gift of forgiving, are permitted to express, like the writers of the lament and imprecatory psalms, unforgiving emotions such as anger, shame, depression, and grief. This process is part of the natural, necessary, and even faithful reactions leading to forgiving stages. As the victim realizes the damage and pain he has suffered, he will ask the power of grace to forgive the offender beyond his own emotions, and, thus, the power of Christ, which is promised to the believer in weakness (2 Cor 12:9; 13:3-4), can be poured out on the believer. Jesus Christ, who experienced the worst offense on the cross, can understand the victim's agony, heal the hurt, and give the power to forgive (Heb 4:15; 5:7-9).

Fifth, Christians who are victimized and have suffered by the hands of others may look weak, but are, in fact, strong in Christ (2 Cor 12:9). Teaching Christians that they have a paradoxical identity, in the same way Jesus did (Gal 4:19; John 15:4-5, 20), can empower them in the process of forgiveness. According to the apostle John, Christ is not just a weak victim, a slain lamb, but also a strong sovereign king, a lion (Rev 5:5-6). Christ, condemned as a criminal and having suffered a most humiliating death on the cross, was resurrected and ascended as victorious King (Acts 7:55-56; Heb 10:12; 1 Pet 3:22). In other words, Christ became a

victorious and sovereign King (Rev 19:16), a lion, exactly because he had become a humiliated victim, a slain lamb. In addition, John, in Revelation, describes Christ's followers with this paradoxical identity. Like Christ, his followers seem to be weak victims, slain by the hands of powerful wicked men (Rev 6:9; 17:6), but, in fact, they are strong and become the final victors in Christ (Rev 12:11; 17:14). In other words, Christians belong to and follow Christ (Rev 14:4), who is powerful, victorious, and strong (Rev 5:12-13; 17:14; 22:1-5, 13), even though he is the primary offended party with regard to all human sins (Rom 8:7; 5:6-11). Thus, Christians are called to become strong, although they are victims, and rather than being reactive, become proactive forgivers in broken relationships (Matt 18:15-18). The analogy between Christ and Christians, as seemingly being weak but ultimately being victoriously powerful, is presented in Paul's thoughts, too. Paul states in 2 Corinthians 13:4:

For indeed He was crucified because of weakness, yet He lives because of the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, yet we will live with Him because of the power of God directed toward you.

If the Spirit of Jesus dwells in Christians in their weakness and suffering, they are empowered (Volf, 2006a; Jones, 1995; Fee, 1996), even as they are seemingly weak and humiliated, to be strong personal agents by the power of Christ's grace that shines through and overcomes hurt and suffering (2 Cor 12:9-10; 13:4).

As examined before, the OT describes only seemingly strong victims who forgive their offenders, such as Joseph, Esau, and David. Therefore, biblically, forgiveness must come from the strength of man, not from his weakness. Victims, such as Jotham (Judg 9: 1-20) or Zechariah (2 Chron 24:22), who were in a weaker position than their offenders, sought God's justice through punishment of the offender. OT people did not live with the NT truth that victims, who seem to have a weaker status than their offenders, can in fact be much stronger through the empowerment of the Spirit. Victims under the New Covenant are ultimately strong, because they are Christ's representatives (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13). In addition, there is the mystery that the power of Christ is perfected in one's weakness (2 Cor 12:9). In this respect, Peter commands Christian victims, who are called to reflect Jesus (1 Pet 2: 21-25), to bless their

offenders (1 Pet 3:9). He argues that the Christian victim must be in a stronger and higher position than the offender, because biblically “the lesser is blessed by the greater” (Heb 7:7), in the same way that God blesses humans (Gen 14:19; 28:3). Therefore, though, at the early stage of unforgiveness, victims mourn their weakness and loss resulting from the experienced wrongdoing, in the process of forgiveness, they should be conscious of the fact that they are strong agents reflecting Christ (Eph 4:32; 1 Pet 3:9).

Sixth, Christian’s need to be encouraged to understand that suffering in the process of forgiveness is part of growing into the image of Christ, which, in turn, can help them forgive more willingly. Bonhoeffer (1963) states in *The Cost of Discipleship*: “Forgiveness is the Christlike suffering which it is the Christian’s duty to bear” (p. 100). Forgiving those who humiliated and injured someone, is not just a glorious opportunity to imitate Christ, it may cause serious suffering as the natural desire of getting even is denied. As we examined in the previous chapters, forgiveness is the offended party’s unilateral and gracious act of releasing and liberating the offender from the sin or debt caused by that offense on the basis of love. Thus, canceling the debt that the victim has the just right to be paid, or absorbing the wound from the offender must be cause for serious suffering.

In fact, one can find that suffering is a central aspect of divine forgiveness through Jesus’ atonement as the archetype of human forgiveness. As Piper points out in the book of *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*, “Christ bore our sins and purchased our forgiveness and he did it by suffering” (Piper & Taylor, 2006, p. 87). Further, as we already examined, throughout his life Jesus was a habitual sufferer (Heb 5:8), while simultaneously being a habitual forgiver. Thus, it is very natural that a central factor of Christian human forgiveness is suffering. This aspect helps Christians fight their evil tendency of wanting to take revenge and grow conform the image of Christ with more faith and knowledge of God by overcoming this sinful desire. Bonhoeffer (1963) states that in the passage of Mark 8:31-38, Jesus’ calling disciples to follow and bear the cross is closely connected with his passion on the cross:

Just as Christ is Christ only in virtue of his suffering and rejection, so the disciple is a



disciple only in so far as he shares his Lord's suffering and rejection and crucifixion. Discipleship means adherence to the person of Jesus, and therefore submission to the law of Christ which is the law of the cross. (p. 96)

And he states that for Christians forgiveness is a way of obeying Jesus' commandment of bearing the cross:

"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal. 6.2). As Christ bears our burdens, so ought we to bear the burdens of our fellow-men. The law of Christ, which it is our duty to fulfil, is the bearing of the cross. My brother's burden which I must bear is not only his outward lot, his natural characteristics and gifts, but quite literally his sin. And the only way to bear that sin is by forgiving it in the power of the cross of Christ in which I now share. Thus the call to follow Christ always means a call to share the work of forgiving men their sins. (p. 100)

In other words, Christians are called to imitate the glorious suffering that is inherent to forgiveness. Thus, they follow Christ who chose to become the best forgiver at the very moment of his greatest suffering (Luke 23:34). Further, if Christians are strong in suffering, they grow in perseverance, which produces Christian character (Rom 5:3-4). Just as Christ overcame the suffering of the cross only by intentionally accepting the cup of suffering (Matt 26:42) and so received the glory of the resurrection, so, Christians, who willfully accept suffering through the act of forgiveness, will receive glory through union with Christ.

Seventh, forgiveness should not be understood merely as a coping strategy with regard to a broken relationship, but rather as an ongoing life style. The virtue of forgiveness, which is connected with the victim's moral self, develops, like other virtues, through continual practice over time (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). Jones (1995) states,

The craft of forgiveness involves the ongoing and ever-deepening process of unlearning sin through forgiveness and learning, through specific habits and practices, to live in communion—with the Triune God, with one another, and with the whole Creation. This priority of forgiveness is a sign of the peace of God's original Creation as well as the promised consummation of that Creation in God's kingdom, and also a sign of the costliness by which such forgiveness is achieved. (p. xii)

One's repetitive response to offensive events strengthens a certain tendency until it is fixed in one's character (Worthington, 2006; Lampton, Oliver, Worthington, & Berry, 2005). For example, the individual who responds with anger and unforgiveness to others' wrongdoings will, over time, increasingly and more easily become angry, and will, eventually, have an angry and unforgiving character. On the contrary, if the same person continually responds to offensive

events like Jesus, his character will become more and more like Jesus. Kendall (2009)

emphasizes the need to practice forgiveness:

Forgiveness, like painting or sculpting, takes practice. With art, one starts with a small project and then moves to more complex and imaginative expression. With forgiving, you need to start with small hurts (marginal offenses) and work your way up to the big ones (mortal offenses). (p. 56)

Therefore, church leaders cannot emphasize enough that Christians, as Jesus followers, are called to practice habitual forgiveness, beginning by learning to forgive minimal offenses and, gradually, maturing into forgivers of more serious offenses.

Eight, God promises to bless Christlike forgivers: “Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing” (1 Pet 3:9). This verse is part of a passage that discusses the Christian ethic of not retaliating but blessing when faced with hardship as being essential to one’s new identity (1 Pet 1:3) (Fitzgerald, van Rensburg & van Rooy, 2009). Peter’s motive for this teaching is the imitation of Jesus Christ (1 Pet 2:23) and it parallels Jesus’ teachings (Matt 5:44; Luke 6:27-28) and Paul’s instructions (Rom 12:17). According to Peter (1 Pet 3:9), the result or purpose of Christians’ repaying evil with blessing rather than with evil, is that they may inherit a blessing from God.

Calvin comments on 1 Peter 3:9 as follows:

*Knowing that ye are thereunto called* He means that this condition was required of the faithful when they were called by God, that they were not only to be so meek as not to retaliate injuries, but also to bless those who cursed them; and as this condition may seem almost unjust, he calls their attention to the reward; as though he had said, that there is no reason why the faithful should complain, because their wrongs would turn to their own benefit. In short, he shews how much would be the gain of patience; for if we submissively bear injuries, the Lord will bestow on us his blessing. (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/calvin/cc45/cc45007.htm>)

This blessing from God is so enormous and eternal that others’ offenses cannot cancel or affect it (Ellicott, 2015). Reversely, this verse implies that Christians repaying evil with evil or responding with retaliation may block God’s blessing. Also, Fitzgerald, van Rensburg and van Rooy (2009) state about this same verse of 1 Peter 3:9 as follows:

it becomes evident that the addressees’ attitude toward others is not to be determined by the attitude they adopt toward them but by their relationship toward God and their recollection of the kind of life to which he has called them. (p. 226)

Then, what does this blessing entail? Generally, blessings in the OT, though they may include spiritual aspects (Ps 32:1), mainly refer to material and physical prosperity (Gen 28:3; Deut 28). Blessing in the NT, however, should be understood in the context of spiritual rather than material benefits (*EDBT*). In his sermon in Acts 3:25-26, Peter interprets blessing spiritually:

It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. For you first, God raised up his servant and sent him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways.

Thus, first of all, blessing, as an extension of God's salvation, refers to our perpetrators becoming God's righteous people by leaving their sinful ways. The victim can best express his blessing to the offender using kind words and actions, rather than unkind insults or evil actions (1 Pet 3:10) (Ellicott, 2015). Further, according to Jesus in Matthew 5:44, praying for the offender is included in this blessing (Fitzgerald, van Rensburg & van Rooy, 2009). For Paul, blessing can refer to justification and the forgiveness of sin (Rom 4:6-9). The victim's prayer for the offender, then, might include not only prayers for material or physical wellbeing but also for spiritual wellbeing, such as praying that God discipline the offender or that the offender repent, resulting in the offender's securing human and divine forgiveness. Church leaders need, thus, to encourage their members to bless the offenders with a compassionate, loving, and humble heart so that they can inherit God's blessing (1 Pet 3:8-9).

The last truth that can help in the process of forgiveness, is that Christ, who was dead, resurrected, and ascended, now continues to pray for the Christians' divine forgiveness of their daily sins (1 John 2:1), but also for their struggle against the sin of unforgiveness and for strength to be obedient in forgiving others (Heb 1:3; 7:25; Rom 8:34). Jesus, the mediator between the Father and mankind, interceded for his disciples in his public life (Luke 22:32; John 11:38-42; 17:1-26) and still prays for his people at the right side of the Father (Heb 1:3; 7:25; 9:24; Acts 5:30-31; 13:36-38; Rom 8:34). Jamieson (2016) states,

Jesus Christ has ascended and he continues to pray for us, mediating our broken, unforgiving humanity to his Father. In his vicarious humanity, he continues to present us in

himself to the Father in his ongoing self-offering. And our great High Priest is especially aware of how difficult forgiveness is and so he prays for us. The reality of Christ's ongoing work is never a call for us to give in or give up. Instead, ever and always, it is the call to persevere and to never doubt the depths of God's love for us. (e-book, Location 1944)

As they work toward forgiveness, victims can be assured that the ascended Jesus prays for them with perfect understanding and compassion for their hurt and suffering.

### **Forgiveness Education in the Church**

According to Psalm 86:5, God is ready to forgive: "For you, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon you." As examined before, God's readiness of forgiving sinners is fundamentally rooted in his eternal character as a divine action that expresses God's eternal attributes of goodness and love (Boda & Smith, 2006; Fretheim, 1991; Belousek, 2011). Like God, Christians should have a forgiving character and be ready to forgive. This is the reason a forgiveness education program in the Christian community would be very important to help each Christian member to be transformed into the image of the perfect forgiver, Christ. Research shows that forgiveness education is very effective to help victims to forgive by increasing the victim's hope, proper self-esteem, and a positive attitude towards the offender, while decreasing the victim's depression, anger, and anxiety (Freedman & Enright, 1996; Coyle & Enright, 1997; Lampton, Oliver, Worthington, & Berry, 2005). As mentioned before, forgiveness is a virtue Christians are called to practice daily. This virtue is part of the ongoing sanctification and development of the virtuous new self in Christ and mortification of the corrupted old self (cf. Eph 3:22-24; Col 3:1-10). According to Worthington (2006), "a forgiving disposition can be facilitated by nature and nurture" (p. 113). In other words, though some are born better forgivers than others, all individuals can mature in becoming good forgivers when they practice this virtue and are encouraged through education and a forgiving environment.

Because of the effect of nurture on one's forgiving disposition, Magnuson and Enright (2008) state that local churches have a strong need of teaching their members how to forgive:

To maximize the positive outcomes associated with transforming a church into a Forgiving Community, then, forgiveness education needs to address multiple levels within the

congregation. If forgiveness education comes only from the pastor's sermons or only from Sunday school, the impact will be diminished. Developing a forgiving climate begins with church leadership, from the pastor/priest to the associate ministers, to the lay volunteers who carry out various ministries within the congregation, to the couples and families who make up the congregation, to the individual. In such a progression, multiple forgiving communities may slowly begin to change church culture and energize congregations that might be stuck in maintaining "status quo" ministry. (pp. 12-13)

Lampton, Oliver, Worthington, and Berry (2005) also argue that "churches can promote forgiving by promoting an environment that explicitly values forgiveness by preaching, teaching, and providing experiential opportunities that explicitly promote forgiveness" (p. 279). Thus, people in Christian communities are called to unlearn sinful habits and learn Christlike forgiveness in the journey of sanctification (Jones, 2000).

**Practicing repentance in the church.** As examined already, according to Jesus, the first and foremost basic strategy for his followers to be Christlike forgivers is to become good repenters by reminding themselves every day that they are also sinners like their offenders (Matt 6:12, 14-15; 18:33). When Christians forgive their enemies, they simultaneously admit their own sinfulness in their identification with an offender. Moreover, they give evidence of the fact that their repentance, through which they have secured God's forgiveness, is genuine. Those who acknowledge their sinfulness or faults will, most likely, be better forgivers and better at empathizing with their offenders than those who are unrepentant. The fact that a good repentor becomes a good forgiver makes sense, because, biblically, both repentance and forgiveness happen in the one same tender heart (2 Kings 22:19; Ezek 11:19; Matt 18:35). Further, those who have repented to God and others show that they have humility, which is a major factor in being a good forgiver. It is, in fact, true that arrogant persons have a greater tendency to be unforgiving (Worthington, 2006). In this respect, Storts (2007) states that repentance is the first step of forgiveness:

Repentance invites everyone to confess the dark side of the Golden Rule: "I could do unto you what you have done unto me—and then some!" Repentance resists the irresistible desire to return evil for evil. The Greek word for repentance, *metanoia*, literally means "turning away." It signals a turn away from violence on the part of both the victim and offender. "Forgive us . . . as we forgive. . . ." Those who pray this prayer remind themselves again and again of their own propensity for violence. The petition presents repentance as the first step in this practice of forgiveness. Too often people treat

forgiveness and repentance as if they were separate job descriptions: one for the victim, the other for the offender. The offender's task is to repent; the victim's to forgive. Christian forgiveness invites everyone to repent, including the victim, as all acknowledge the desire for revenge and renounce it. (p. 16)

Therefore, to make Christians habitual forgivers, church leaders need to teach them to also practice repentance as a way of life. Sins need to be confessed to God, but also to other mature and trustworthy Christian brothers or sisters, who, although they share the same weakness of humanity, point to Christ (Jas 5:16). Jamieson (2016) states that when hearing someone's confession, one should be humble and compassionate and speak gently by seeing the other with the eyes of Christ (John 8:11). Those who hear the confession, whether they are the direct victim or not, need to clearly proclaim forgiveness. Bonhoeffer (2009) explains why the verbal expression of forgiveness is important:

As the open confession of my sins to a brother insures me against self-deception, so, too, the assurance of forgiveness becomes fully certain to me only when it is spoken by a brother in the name of God" (p. 116).

Bonhoeffer (2009) argues that until mutual confession is practiced, Christian communities, despite their efforts to create true fellowship, remain void of real communion:

When he did that [giving his followers the authority to hear confessions and forgive sins] Christ made the Church, and in it our brother, a blessing to us. Now our brother stands in Christ's stead. Before him I need no longer to dissemble. Before him alone in the whole world I dare to be the sinner that I am; here the truth of Jesus Christ and his mercy rules. Christ became our Brother in order to help us. Through him our brother has become Christ for us in the power and authority of the commission Christ has given to him. Our brother stands before us as the sign of the truth and the grace of God. He has been given to us to help us. He hears the confession of our sins in Christ's stead and he forgives our sins in Christ's name. He keeps the secret of our confession as God keeps it. When I go to my brother to confess, I am going to God. (pp. 111-12)

Learning to confess one's sins to other Christians and to practice repentance is essential to living a life marked by habitual forgiveness. Not practicing confession or repentance weakens or prevents the awareness that, though victims, they are forgiven sinners as well. That reality helps these victims to forgive their offenders with empathy and humility. To promote forgiveness, soul-care givers can ask victims to remember their own experience of being an offender. In this respect, Greer and Worthington (2010) in their workbook for becoming a more forgiving Christian suggest that soul-care givers ask these concrete questions to help the victim

to stand in the place of the offender:

1. What did it feel like to be in trouble, to lose face, to lose respect or self-respect, and to need forgiveness? 2. What does it feel like in your stomach? How did your palms feel? Other parts of the body? 3. What would you call the emotions that you experienced as you realized that you had sinned and needed forgiveness? 4. What did it feel (or would it have felt) like to ask the person you hurt for forgiveness and to have received it? Were you humbled? (p. 53)

In conclusion, a church environment that is conducive to expressing repentance enables Christians to confess sins in their families, workplaces, and churches. This is an essential prerequisite of being a good forgiver.

**Educating forgiveness through worship.** Jones states in *Practicing Our Faith* (Bass, 2010) that local churches can help church members become habitual forgivers through worship, which can prompt them to recall and imagine “the gift and the task of practicing forgiveness” as their way of life (p. 145). Because the church is made up of a community of relationships with God and others (Bridges, 2012), it is a place where one can experience relational problems and practice repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Magnuson and Enright (2008) argue for the importance of pastors, especially senior pastors, modeling a life style of forgiveness if the church is to be a forgiving community of forgiven saints.

The communal worship provides a good opportunity to convey the importance of forgiveness through hymns, sermons, prayers, and talks. Songs, for example, can center around themes related to forgiveness, such as enemy love, humility, mercy, repentance, and reconciliation. “Singing together unites, or re-unites, people by redrawing the boundaries of community in which there is a responsibility both to perform and to listen” (Jones, 2000, p. 132). Bonhoeffer (2009) writes,

“Speak to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (Eph 5:19). Our song on earth is speech. It is the sung Word. Why do Christians sing when they are together? The reason is, quite simply, because in singing together it is possible for them to speak and pray the same Word at the same time; in other words, because here they can unite in the Word. All devotion, all attention should be concentrated upon the Word in the hymn. The fact that we do not speak it but sing it only expresses the fact that our spoken words are inadequate to express what we want to say, that the burden of our song goes far beyond all human words. Yet we do not hum a melody; we sing words of praise to God, words of thanksgiving, confession, and prayer. Thus the music is completely the servant of the Word.

It elucidates the Word in its mystery. (p. 59)

In this respect, songs on forgiveness will deepen the teaching on forgiveness, which is also proclaimed through the sermon, and will promote motivation to forgive.

A special forgiveness worship service, held every three to six months, would be ideal as it could be designed to facilitate forgiveness among church members. The sermon during this service will be on human forgiveness, which will encourage the audience to seek and grant forgiveness. A special time of prayer after the sermon, gives room to the victim to pray for the offender. According to Jesus, prayer is a crucial factor for Christians to love and forgive their enemies: “You have heard that it was said, ‘you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt 5:43-44). As mentioned before, in the early stages of forgiveness, the victim’s prayer would be very similar to the lament and imprecatory psalms. The reason is that through prayer the victim will recall the offense, acknowledge the suffering and negative emotions, such as anger, and express the spirit of unforgiveness. However, through the deepening of the prayer, the victim can be honest about her sinful thoughts towards the offender, such as feeling morally superior, or not wanting to forgive, or having a hardened heart. Consequently, she can develop the desire to forgive and reframe her thoughts toward the offender. Research shows that, in fact, the victim’s prayer for the offender fosters forgiveness (Lambert, Fincham, Stillman, Graham & Beach, 2009; McMinn, Fervida, Louwse, Thompson, Trihub, & McLeod-Harrison, 2008). During the forgiveness worship service, the victim’s prayers would be very effective on the journey of forgiveness. This is heightened by the fact that the pastor can ask the audience to examine their hearts toward their offenders and towards forgiveness and he can suggest to pray that God will help to forgive the offender at that moment. Further, after the prayer, the pastor can suggest to write down a commitment of forgiveness before the motivation to forgive wanes. Distributed handouts can help in this process, for example:

I, (name of forgiver) decide to forgive (name of the forgiven) for (content of the offense). So I will



- ( ) stop blaming my offender and complaining to (myself, others).
- ( ) not imagine or plan to retaliate my offender.
- ( ) bless my offender.
- ( ) pray for my offender regarding his or her (repentance, health, relationship.....)
- ( ) do my best to be a Christlike forgiver.

And I will share my commitment of forgiving (name of the forgiven) with (name of accountability person).

As Worthington (2003) points out, when one shares a decision with others, one tends to keep the commitment better. Such a resolution would allow the victim to examine her attitude toward the offender and when she finds disjunction between her resolution and her behaviors, it could result in a more mature forgiveness afterward.

**Forgiveness talk in small group.** In small group meetings after or during the week of the forgiveness worship, church members can talk about their issues of seeking or extending forgiveness in their relationships. In fact, small group meetings, rather than the worship meeting, are the best venue to deal with specific issues related to forgiveness. In small groups, people feel safer to share their story honestly with others and they can experience that others may struggle with similar issues, which creates an atmosphere of support (Jamieson, 2016). Usually, forgiveness interventions in group therapy, whether religious based or not, are regarded very effective (McCullough et al., 2001; Snyder & Lopez, 2002).

At the beginning of the meeting, the group leader may need to summarize the definition and process of forgiveness, the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation, and the sermon on forgiveness of the week. Consequently, members of the group can discuss their experience and thoughts about forgiveness. They can share their commitment of forgiveness, which they made during the worship service. To promote forgiveness and to help each member become a better forgiver, the leader can encourage the members to check at what stage they are

in the process of forgiveness, such as unforgiveness, decisional, intermediate, or emotional forgiveness. They can learn to set concrete and realistic goals, because unrealistic goals can frustrate the forgiveness process and reduce one's self-efficacy.

In this process, everyone's journey and personal agency need to be respected. Even when someone is in the stage of struggling with unforgiving emotions, such as anger, bitterness, desire of revenge, and sadness, which are typical initial reactions to an offense, other members need to admit those emotions as natural, rather than coercing this person to grant premature forgiveness. They need to encourage victims to deal honestly with the various unforgiving emotions before God, who is the perfect Judge and Forgiver, before they move on to other stages of forgiveness. Passionate petitions, complaints, and the desire for God to avenge are signs of faith just as much as merciful, sacrificial forgiveness and love (Glenn, 1996; Jones, 2007).

**Forgiveness workshop in the church setting.** For those who have serious problems with forgiveness, the church can offer forgiveness workshops, which can be held during the weekend as one intensive event, or for one hour or two hours on a weekly basis. Forgiveness workshops in small groups are reported as being effective for promoting forgiveness, receiving and giving encouragement, and reducing negative emotions, such as grief, anxiety, and anger (Snyder & Lopez, 2002). Workshops can be led by church leaders or professional Christian soul care ministers. McCullough and his colleagues (2001) state that the duration and times of the sessions are very important and should last at least six hours.

Several tools can facilitate more focused forgiveness interventions. Forgiveness inventories help members assess their levels of readiness and the extent to which they have a forgiving character. Examples are the Enright Forgiveness Inventory (EFI), which has 60 items (Enright & Rique, 2004), Transgression-Related Inventory of Motivations (TRIM) (McCullough, Rachal, Sandage, Worthington, Brown, & Hight, 1998), and the Trait Forgivingness Scale (TFS) (Berry, Worthington, O'Connor, Parrott, & Wade, 2005). Another tool the local church can use are forgiveness workbooks for Christians, these can be purchased or self-produced. For instance,

Greer and Worthington's (2010) forgiveness workbook is designed to increase forgiveness in Christians and consists of six sessions, which are developed on the basis of related biblical passages and which end with questions to examine one's own experience, thoughts, and knowledge regarding forgiveness. Through these more focused approaches, church members can get more effective help, which may not be found in common forgiveness education or worship services.

**Forgiveness education for children.** Research shows that forgiveness, which is developed as an ability of the moral self, can be taught to children and adolescents (Freedman, 2007; Lin, Enright, & Klatt, 2011). Children can learn forgiveness naturally in a forgiving community, such as one's family and church (Magnuson & Enright, 2008). Enright and his colleagues have developed a forgiveness education curriculum for children between ages 4 and 18 to be used in private and public schools. They report that their curriculum is very effective for developing a forgiving character in children and adolescents by enhancing self-esteem and hope (<https://internationalforgiveness.com/education-and-therapy>; Hilbert, 2015).

Thus, because of the proven effectiveness in the development of children, Christian communities should present their children and adolescents with forgiveness education. The best forgiveness education for children is given by their own parents, not in the least because, in the Bible, parents are supposed to be the primary teachers for children to instill God's ways in them (Deut 6:6-7; 32:46). Christian parents can model forgiveness by repenting to their children when they have done wrong and extending forgiveness when their children have sinned (Bass, 2010). When children are taught to repent and possibly make restitution, they will learn to take responsibility for their own behavior. In addition, when parents seek forgiveness and demonstrate a repenting attitude, children will feel respected. Both the sense of responsibility and (self-)respect will enhance children's personal agency as God's image bearers, which are central factors in granting Christlike forgiveness. There are no better teacher than parents who embody that kind of forgiveness.

Children and youth ministers are important as well (Magnuson & Enright, 2008). Ministers can facilitate a forgiving environment by educating the volunteers who interact with the children and youth. Again, worship, small groups, workshops, or retreats can be tools to educate children to forgive others. Conceptual questionnaires regarding Christian forgiveness can help check children's understanding of forgiveness. Assessing children's concept on forgiveness is very important, because younger children can often fail to grasp abstract concepts and to integrate various information sources (Worthington, 2005). Further, forgiveness scales, like those mentioned above, are developed for children as well. Enright (2000) made the Enright Forgiveness Inventory for Children (EFI-C) to assess children's forgiving status toward their offender. To help Christian children and adolescents become habitual forgivers, ministers and volunteers need to interact and talk with them on a regular basis in order to understand the idiosyncratic emotional, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral development of each of the youngsters.

### **Summary of the Dissertation**

#### **Thesis**

The central claim of this dissertation is that the biblical revelation of forgiveness has developed through redemptive history with shifts in emphasis, namely, (1) from divine to human forgiveness, (2) from a conditional to an unconditional offer of forgiveness, (3) from justice-focused to love-focused forgiveness, and (4) from the offender's responsibility to repent to the victim's willingness to forgive. This development culminated in the unfolding of divine forgiveness manifested in the new covenant era, which reveals forgiveness as consisting of an unconditional offer of forgiveness (Rom 5:6-11), conditional attainment of forgiveness, and reconciliation after repentance (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:30-31). Divine forgiveness, consequently, becomes the prototype of Christian human forgiveness, which comprises the victim's unconditional grant of forgiveness and the offender's conditional attainment of forgiveness after repentance.

## **Methodology**

I substantiated my argument by interpreting biblical passages on forgiveness, integrating the various valid interpretations, diachronically inspecting the concept through a redemptive-historical lens, and exploring scientific research on human forgiveness. The theme of forgiveness, as an important theme of redemptive history shows progressive development through different contexts in biblical history up until the coming of Jesus Christ, to whom all biblical revelation points. The development of this redemptive view of forgiveness can be imagined as a spiral form in which the outermost circle is the final form that fulfills all past forms, leading to a comprehensive and multiform concept of biblical forgiveness that hopefully avoids a reductionist understanding of forgiveness.

## **Chapter one: Introduction**

In Chapter 1, I intended to highlight the need for a new model of Christian human forgiveness by presenting major disagreements regarding understandings of divine and human forgiveness. Furthermore, an initial survey of divine forgiveness, as the prototype of human forgiveness, was offered, because, most likely, disagreements on human forgiveness in Christianity result mainly from misunderstandings regarding this concept. A proper understanding of divine forgiveness prepares readers to grasp the development of divine and human forgiveness in the Bible in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

## **Chapter two: Development of Forgiveness in the OT and the Intertestamental Period**

From creation to the patriarchal age, rudimentary revelations of divine forgiveness are visible through the primeval worship system and include a mediator as God's covenantal partner. In the Mosaic period, after the exodus from Egypt, God's forgiveness focuses on the nation of Israel on the basis of the written law. Therefore, forgiveness is national or communal rather than individualistic. In this era, the idea that sins, especially the sin of idolatry, result in disaster and suffering becomes clearer than in the previous era. God provides a way for forgiveness through

rituals and intercessors such as Moses and the priests.

During the settlement and monarchy periods, the most important sin was idolatry or apostasy. Repentance (both negative repentance—that is a return from the sin of idolatry—and positive repentance—that is, turning to the Lord as the one true God) becomes the central condition of divine forgiveness; the judgment of the exile came because of Israel's failure to repent of their apostasy and not because of the apostasy itself.

In the age of the prophets, the prophets were deeply concerned not only about vertical sin against God, but also about horizontal sins against other human beings. They had a more advanced concept of sin, based on individual responsibility. Their central message was a call to repent of the sins against both God and others.

In the post-exilic period, various means of securing divine forgiveness were introduced. Examples of these righteous works are prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and a martyr's death. After the exile, personal repentance was strongly emphasized as the main condition for divine forgiveness.

OT teaching with regard to human forgiveness is largely implicit with the exception of a few stories. These stories emphasize the offender's role of initiating reconciliation through repentance and restitution, whereas the victim's response served as an analogy for how God responds. Human forgiveness was more significantly developed during the intertestamental period. Those teachings found their way into the NT, which reveals the fullest model of human forgiveness.

### **Chapter three: Forgiveness in the NT**

The final form of biblical forgiveness is revealed and accomplished through Jesus Christ and has undergone a remarkable development as compared to the OT. Unlike OT conditional forgiveness, which focused merely on God and Israel, in the NT, divine forgiveness is revealed as being unilaterally prepared and offered to all unrepentant sinners. Furthermore, in the NT, human forgiveness is expected as an aspect of Christian sanctification, the process of

being conformed to the image of Christ; Christians are to imitate God in his forgiving. The NT, therefore, offers explicit teaching on human forgiveness and the victim's role in this process, while simultaneously holding to the OT tradition that emphasizes the offender's duty to repent in order to receive forgiveness. Thus, in its full-grown form, "the need both for the offended party to forgive and for the offending party to seek forgiveness becomes paramount" in biblical forgiveness (Barton & Reimer, 1996, p.281). This development compliments the themes of repentance and forgiveness or justice and mercy in the NT. With the amazing gift of unilateral and irresistible grace embodied in Jesus Christ (Heb 1:1-3), the NT accentuates not only love for one's neighbors, but for one's enemies as well. Through various redemptive stages, then, biblical forgiveness has developed and expanded; it has not abandoned its previous OT forms, but, building on the OT revelation, has been transposed into its highest form as revealed through Jesus.

#### **Chapter four: The Application of Biblical Human Forgiveness**

In light of the foregoing discussions and with the addition of empirical research on the topic of forgiveness, a Christian psychological model of biblical human forgiveness was developed in the fourth chapter. Thus, both basic principles of Christian human forgiveness and—as valuable source of creation grace—scientific research—such as dynamics of forgiveness, reasons for unforgiveness, and the psychological processes of forgiveness—were examined and used to contribute to a comprehensive model of human forgiveness.

#### **Chapter five: Conclusion**

In the current, final, chapter of this dissertation, suggestions were made as to how Christians can practice forgiveness in the church as the beneficiaries of the final and completed revelation. The principles of biblical forgiveness were applied to ideas for educating Christians to enable the church to grow into a forgiven and forgiving community. Ideas for future research regarding forgiveness are, next, put forward for consideration, before concluding this

dissertation.

### **Future Research**

Two areas of research would benefit the practice of forgiveness. First, tools and interventions should be developed to enhance the victims' awareness of their dual identity as being both weak and strong. OT narratives show that the stronger and higher the victim's position is as compared to that of the offender, the easier it is to forgive. The NT contrasts the initial apparent weakness of victims with their ultimate strength and power as conquerors in Christ. They derive this identity from the Lord Christ who is both the weakest victim (Isa 53: 2-8; 2 Cor 13:4), as the slain lamb (Rev 5:6), and the strongest forgiver (Luke 23:34), as the lion of Judah (Rev 5:5). However, because they are shamed and wounded by others who were stronger at that moment, Christian victims identify more easily with being weak. Research can help to develop methods for enhancing the Christian victim's awareness as a strong personal agent, who, in Christ, can be a creative forgiver.

Furthermore, the lament and imprecatory psalms give evidence to the fact that God considers the negative feelings of a Christian victim to be a legitimate response. As part of the faith journey, it is important to lay those feelings before God, rather than repressing them. The second area of research, therefore, should focus on using and developing tools to facilitate the victim's honest emotional expressions before God as well as doing empirical research regarding their effectiveness. Pouring out one's negative emotions is necessary for the healing or restoration of the victim as a personal agent and is recommended in the Bible: "trust in him at all times, people; Pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us" (Ps 62:8). However, there is little research on the methods, timing, and duration of biblical expression of negative emotions in the forgiveness process, or how the victim's negative unforgiving emotions are replaced with positive forgiving emotions through honest talk with God.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have examined how local churches as forgiven and forgiving



communities can encourage their members, as Jesus' followers, to become Christlike habitual forgivers through forgiveness education. Some ideas for future research were offered as well. Forgiveness, a practice that developed throughout redemptive history, is central to the journey of Christian sanctification and conformity to Christ. Following the final revelation of forgiveness in Christ, Christians are called both to repent responsibly to their victim, who is God's representative; and, imitating God, to grant the dutiful gift of merciful forgiveness (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13). Because of the presence of Jesus Christ within—a mystery unknown to the people in the OT—who was both weak and strong, Christian victims can be strong personal agents as they offer merciful Christlike forgiveness, even in their weakest moments of being victimized.

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## ABSTRACT

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF BIBLICAL FORGIVENESS IN REDEMPTIVE HISTORY

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The purpose of this dissertation is to propose such a comprehensive model of biblical forgiveness by interpreting biblical passages on forgiveness, integrating the various valid interpretations, and diachronically inspecting the concept through a redemptive-historical lens. Viewing the topic from a synchronic perspective, rather than a diachronic will show that the revelation of sin, covenant, redemption and law have been organically and progressively developed through biblical history in the context of the meta-narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. A redemptive-historical view reveals diverse forms of forgiveness according to different contexts; divine forgiveness which refers to God's forgiveness of sinners and human forgiveness which refers to a human victim's forgiveness of a perpetrator. The argument of this paper is that the revelation of forgiveness in the Bible has developed through redemptive history with shifts in emphasis (1) from divine to human forgiveness, (2) from a conditional to unconditional offer of forgiveness, (3) from justice-focused to love-focused forgiveness, and (4) from the offender's responsibility to repent to the victim's willingness to forgive, until divine forgiveness is finally revealed through Jesus Christ (Rom 5:8-11). Because biblical forgiveness — both divine and human— is built upon the revelation of each prior

stage, its development should not be overlooked or reduced to the form of only one of the stages.

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