

THE POWER OF FORGIVENES

By Rolf E. Keusen

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To my lovely wife Erika

PREFACE

Even though a lot has been said and written about the topic of “forgiveness,” the book by Rolf Keusen offers unique and important insights, which every Christian but should not only know but also practice. Different from all other religions, the God of the Bible offers Christians the unmerited gift of forgiveness. If we wanted to, we could forgive others any debt, receive forgiveness ourselves and enter through this into a life of complete freedom.

Practiced forgiveness is the key for healed and good relationships, for a life of freedom, healing and authority. Although forgiveness is part of biblical teaching, many Christians do not take it seriously and they do not practice it. The psalmist says:

Psalm 103

... who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases.

When we forgive, then God forgives us also, and the way for inner and physical healing is opened. This has an effect on our marriages, family and throughout all of our relationships. We forgive others and our relationships will be restored.

On the other hand, if we don't forgive that which was done to us or if we don't ask for forgiveness of those we have wronged, then Satan has the right to attack. Possible points of attack are: sickness, sleep problems, depression and much more. This is clearly illustrated in the story about the servant in Matthew 18.

The worst would be that we decide NOT to forgive – because then God can NOT forgive us our trespasses either. God has committed himself to His word to forgive, when we forgive. That is why the theme of “forgiveness” is decisive in realizing a life of freedom.

We are thankful to Rolf Keusen that he has written down all the connections in clear, comprehensible and profound ways. We believe that this book will release a great blessing and much deliverance to those readers who will take it to heart. We approve that this topic will be discussed in such clarity one more time.

Jesus says: “Blessed is he who listens to his word and obeys.” We wish that this book causes you to be a listener and doer of HIS word. It will bring deliverance and healing in many areas of your life.

Dr. Christoph Häselbarth

INTRODUCTION

The impulse to write this book goes back to my experience that many people have a completely wrong understanding of forgiveness and therefore exclude themselves from many blessings. I have not attempted to treat this topic comprehensively in a theological manner but to write it as a pointed and practiced compass. This is intended to help people get out of the imprisonment of unforgiveness. The biblical citations are mostly from *New King James version*.

Before we work our way into this topic, I want to explain some basic principals upon which further thoughts are built.

John 15:5

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in Him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

Jesus teaches us that we are a vessel, a temple, a branch, that is, we are a part of his body. If we look at these terms a little closer, we discover that they have something in common: We are not really able to live unless we are connected to or filled by the true source. In other words: to be apart from Jesus we can't do anything of eternal worth.

If we believe that God's Word is true, then it also pertains to Jesus' statement, that we cannot do anything if we are separated from Him. Why then do we fight with God about just how much NOTHING is.

- *Wouldn't it be much smarter to believe God's word and act accordingly?*
- *And if we can do nothing without Him, then we should not do anything without Him.*

God has created us to be not to do

In my life I could first observe in myself, then also in others, how quickly our sense of self-worth is derived from what we do. Too easily do we forget that God has not destined us to do but to be in communion with Him. Everything we do, birthed out of our own works, can never receive God's endorsement.

One of our basic problems is that our flesh tends toward copying patterns of behavior something that already caused Adam and Eve to stumble. They began to think their own thoughts about the "how and what" of their doing – blinded by the diffuse idea that one can

self-actualize. That is how they became susceptible to Satan's whispering, which played to their desires to be independent, and ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. This misdeed separated mankind from intimate communion with God. However, it was God's plan to educate mankind about His ways and His works so that they can be done as He had intended them to be. Yet man decided that he knew best, that he could do it himself and self-actualize apart from God's directive, instead of obeying God, seeking His advice and letting himself be inspired from His wisdom and insights.

If we analyze this latently existing ungodly pressure to do things ourselves, we discover that it stems from a lack of identity. This in turn leads to the crazy assumption that we can define ourselves through our own accomplishments, efforts and the fruit of our own doing.

This thought process stands in diametric opposition to Jesus' teaching that we are not servants, but friends, sons and daughters. Would it not then be advisable to ask him to teach us to **be** sons and daughters?

As long as we do not grasp that son ship is synonymous with Being and the key to the heart of our loving, heavenly Father, we will try to get his attention through our own achievements. Since this is not possible, we look for acceptance from our fellow men and let them admire our deeds. But why, I ask myself, are we always satisfied with the second or third choice, when we are entitled to the first. If we were only prepared to give in to God's offer of the lost, intimate communion with Him.

I am convinced that the conflict between Being and Doing is one of the hardest lessons for us to learn. It is exactly this understanding that makes the difference between a performance-orientated, religious, and legally inclined Christian and a free, filled, happy, and balanced Christian. That is why it is much less burdensome to go God's ways and to do **His** works than to subject ourselves to the frustrations which we encounter in our erroneous ways.

God cannot deny His word and His nature

God cannot deny His word or His nature. He is who He is and keeps what He says. He was the same yesterday, today and for all eternity. He cannot and will not change. Simply because He is God and not human. He is complete and does not have to change. We, on the other hand, are not God, are not "perfect" and therefore are dependent on being changed into Jesus' image.

The free will

One thing which we must keep in mind: God respects our free will. He will never require something of us which we are not willing to give Him freely, that is voluntarily. It is up to us, whether we let Him into all areas of our lives: He wants to, but do we? Under no circumstances will he do something **against** our will. We decide, even if He is God, how far He can

intervene and where.

The topic of the book is based on the following premises:

I ask you to look at every statement in this book with the filter of these premises. Then I am certain that there is no room for self-reproach, condemnation, and accusation.

- *We can do nothing without Him.*
- *God has created us with a longing to be, not to do.*
- *God cannot deny His word nor His nature.*
- *He respects our free will and will never violate this principle.*

CHAPTER 1

Before you pray – forgive!

One of the major points in learning how to pray is forgiveness. This alone should bring us to focus on the proclamation of Jesus. But it should also animate us to grapple with the topic.

In some Christian circles, this topic essential for survival is not considered highly significant. Jesus began to teach about forgiveness the moment his disciples asked him: “Lord, teach us to pray!”

Of course, I asked myself, why Jesus mentioned forgiveness in the context of prayer. Praying is “speaking with the holy God”, who only listens to the prayer of a righteous man. That is the reason why Jesus put forgiveness into the context of prayer. He wanted to be sure that the prayers of his disciples would be prayers of the righteous – and could therefore be heard by God.

John 9:31

Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth.

James 5:16

Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

According to the biblical principles, a “righteous man” is someone, who has received forgiveness of his sins and lives his life according to Jesus’ laws.

God’s word takes forgiveness and reconciliation so seriously that it is not even allowed to give an offering, when a brother has something against you – even that is cause to remove the matter at hand and to reconcile.

Matthews 5:23

Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

I think that it cannot be stated much clearer that we can only draw near to God, once we have forgiven those with whom we have an issue. As long as we don’t really understand this principle, we won’t be able to pray effectively.

Mark 11:25

And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in

heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

If we are ready to go down God's road of mercy then we will receive the revelation of the amazingly freeing power of forgiveness. This will create the premise to experience personally the freedom which was promised.

One thing I can already promise you: If you would like see the wonderful fruit of forgiveness become active in your life, then you should already say good-bye to some of your pre-conceived notions. In the course of this study we will take a closer look at these aspects.

CHAPTER 2

Agape – The presence of God within us

Romans 5:5

And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

God is love. Therefore God is love in person. And because love and God are one and the same, he cannot give love apart from himself. When we have God in us, we have love in us and when we are in this love and then we are in God. God and love cannot be separated. If God would only have love, then he could give us one measure of love; give us this love so-to-speak bit by bit. But because he is love, he can give himself and therefore his love only completely. In order to solve our problem, God has found a brilliant answer. He decided to pour out his love through God the Holy Spirit into our hearts and therewith allows us to partake of his love. This love – poured out in us – is what is meant when the bible speaks about love. If we want to understand what forgiveness means then this will only work if we understand the depth and width of the biblical concept of love.

The English language does not have any clearly defined translations for the commonly used Greek words for love: There are three separate words, rather word groups for love, of which two, namely agapae, agapao and philia, phileo are used in the New Testament.

Definition Agape – Love

From the word of God we can explain Agape as follows: Agape is God's love or love brought about by God, as opposed to philia, the love of friendship, and eros, the longing or desiring love. Eros is not used in the New Testament.

First, agape is God's love to man, which is why man can respond out of the same love. According to Jesus' two-fold command agape is the free, unspeculative acting of man alone for God and his neighbors. The New Testament understands agape completely from God's view, because God *is* agape.

1. John 4:8

He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

1. John 4:16

And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

Primarily, God has revealed the meaning of agape through sending his Son into the world.

1. John 4:9

In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

In order to be able to love God and his neighbors, man must first receive God's love as a gift. Only in this context does the New Testament speak about human love as agape.

1. John 4:19

We love him, because he first loved us.

The Essence of Love

The essence of agape love is described in 1 Corinthians 13. Agape is always spoken of when we are asked to act out of love. And it is what we speak of when we deal with the aspect of love with regard to forgiveness.

1. Corintheiens 13:4 -7

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

In Hebraic culture as opposed to our hellenistically influenced culture, the use of love implies altruistic love, not the love of friendship that is, a self-centered love.

Neither we, nor our needs are the centre, instead the focus has moved to God and therewith to our neighbors. One of the most pertinent examples of God's acting love is that he immediately began to work on the prerequisites for the restoration of the order of creation after the fall of man. He showed mankind directly after the fall his perspective of how we can escape from of the self-imposed imprisonment.

Genesis 3:15

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

As a matter of fact, he was willing to act immediately and did not let our renunciation stand, even though we gave him every reason to.

His concept of restoration had to therefore include that we gain back the godly characteristics that we had lost after the fall of man. It was clear to him that of ourselves, we would not be able to even begin to fulfill the law of love. As evidence, we can read many examples in the reports of the Old Testament. There, men still had to go by the law, which was tasked with satisfying justice. The statement "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth", illustrates this. The law for its part limited the punishment to match the crime. According to the law it was not possible to set the punishment at a higher level than the damage done.

Surely you can imagine, what radical change in thinking Jesus postulated in his sermons. The law demands that we should love God with our whole being, with our entire strength. Being asked what the highest law is, Jesus answered:

Matthews 22:37

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

I can just hear the question of those who heard Jesus' speech: How in the world is that suppose to happen? They had the same sentiments as we do today. Without a doubt we find ourselves in the same dilemma as the people in Jesus' day. On one hand God expects us to love our neighbor as we do ourselves – and this can surely be our enemy. Thank God he does not leave us without help, but offers us a solution for this problem. He himself decided to give himself for us by pouring his love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. And he does that again and again as often as we desire: yesterday, today, and in the future.

He has become a part of us. And that is why he can expect us to live out what he has asked of us. He would never demand something from us that we could not see through. After all, he himself has loved us with this selfless, sacrificial love. Therefore he knows that we, who have been created in his image, are capable of this.

We would probably stand on pretty shaky ground, if we questioned whether that which God has given to us could actually be carried out. His answer would probably be: "Try it before you claim that it will never work." Love, his gift to us, put into action is what he expects from us.

CHAPTER 3

The Quality in the Quantity of Forgiveness

We are going to examine the foundations that Jesus laid as well as the far reaching consequences which an unwillingness to forgive carries.

The Quality of Forgiveness – Whom do we forgive?

Matthews 6:9-13

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

This text suggests that we should not even begin to ask God for forgiveness of our sins, if we have not already forgiven those who have trespassed against us. The Word of God does not give us any options in this regard but a condition of reciprocity. If we want God to forgive us, we must first forgive others. This is described even more clearly in the following passage:

Matthews 6:14-15

For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Forgiveness is not limited to *our* choice of people, the best friend, the favorite aunt – no, every person is to be forgiven, no matter how he or she has offended us. Therefore there are no qualifications, whether sympathy nor antipathy, nor society, relatives, age, or race, neither cultural nor social bounds matter. We are asked to forgive every person.

The Quantity of Forgiveness – how often do we forgive?

Matthews 18: 21-22

Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

Peter had an exceptionally pious idea and I could imagine that he wanted to show Jesus how much of his teaching he had already understood, when he asked him: “Lord, how often should I forgive my brother who sinned against me? Till seven times?” One has to understand that it was normal for a Hebrew to forgive his brother three times. Peter understood well that Jesus taught mercy. Surely, he thought to himself, that if I am ready to give my

brother twice the mercy and add a bonus to it, this would fit Jesus' mercy criteria. Most likely he thought himself on the safe side.

Many people would probably judge Peter's suggestion as generous, pious, and overcorrect. Can you imagine how surprised the apostles must have been about Jesus' answer? "Not seven times, but seventy-seven times" – that is to say: "Peter, stop counting and simply forgive. Forgiveness does not tolerate limits. Begin to live out toward others that which is also granted to you. Make forgiveness a lifestyle and practice it."

An Example

In the parable of the servant Jesus illustrates a really drastic example for what forgiveness entails for the one who forgives but also for the one who receives forgiveness.

If we are not be ready to follow Jesus' instructions, we must anticipate that what happened to the wicked servant will befall us. We will never experience God's blessings, because we refuse to fulfill the conditions for His blessings. On the contrary, although we are God's children, we would not experience the freedom we are meant to have.

Matthews 18:23 – 24

Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.

Let's be clear about what we are really talking about. It is easiest to explain the amount of debt, when we view the owed sum in terms of the daily wage at the time of Jesus. A worker received 1 denarius per day. The servant in this parable owed the king 10'000 talents (1 talent = 6'000 denarius) That is $10'000 \times 6'000 = 60'000'000$ denarius. If we convert this to the daily pay, one would have to work 164'384 years in order to pay back the debt. Or to illustrate more: all citizens of a city, much larger than Freiburg a city in Southern Germany would have to work over a year without a break. Only then would the debt be settled.

Matthews 18: 25-28

But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.

In contrast to his own debt, his fellow servant owed him the laughable sum of 100 working days. But he was not willing to be merciful.

Matthews 28-35

And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave

thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

Surely we would judge the same way since justice would be thusly served. If one is not prepared to pass on to others what has been granted to him, then mercy and grace can no longer be the criteria by which he is judged. In such a case it can only be the law which will be satisfied and through that justice and repentance.

The mercy shown to the wicked servant was overturned and annulled by his behavior. He himself did not comprehend that mercy also needed to be granted to the one who owed him. As we can see illustrated with the example of the wicked servant we will never be able to work off our debt.

Our debt is decidedly too great and cannot be removed through our own doing. We can only rely on mercy. Therefore, it is wise to not gamble away God's offer of mercy and to show those mercy who have become indebted to us.

In conclusion, the following points should be engraved in our memory:

- ***Whom must I forgive?***
We have no choice whom we forgive. God's word requires us to forgive every person who has offended us.
- ***How often and what must I forgive?***
Stop counting and forgive – no matter what people might have done to you.
- ***Our choice***
Forgiveness is your decision. Therefore it is also your decision as to which spiritual law you subject yourself to: the one which brings blessings and which causes God's promises in your life to come to pass or the one which leads to imprisonment and gives you over to the influence of the torturers. It is your decision to keep the torturers out of your.

CHAPTER 4

Definition of Forgiveness

If we want to understand what forgiveness is then we should start by dealing with all the erroneous ideas that we associate with forgiveness. That will give us a clear picture and also a basis for our decision. Let's begin by examining what forgiveness is NOT.

Forgiveness is not an act of justice

Contrary to our need for justice, forgiveness does not satisfy justice. Since we have eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the knowledge regarding consequences from transgressions of law is part of our make-up, it is our quest to pursue and punish transgressions of law.

It is precisely this drive—one that is an impediment—that points to the truth of the biblical report of the fall of man. This is the only way we can explain the deeply rooted awareness of justice—or injustice—in our human nature. We understand that injustice will be followed by punishment, and this understanding is independent of cultural, social, or societal context. That is why the knowledge of law and justice has global validity.

Forgiveness does not mean justification of guilt

Time and again I was confronted with people who had the strange notion that if they forgave they would endorse the wrong that was done to them. This misunderstanding should be among the major blockages that hold us back from forgiving.

Forgiving is not in accord with our feelings

As humans, we are a spirit, we have a soul, and both live in a body. Through our conversion our spirit was born again, but not so with our soul and certainly not our body. We should keep in mind that our feelings are located in our soul. But it is exactly in the area of our soul where the problems with which we battle are rooted, because our fleshly being fights with our born-again spirit and impulsively voices the disapproval it feels.

It is only a small step from the disapproval of our soulish emotions about the open conflict with our spirit to Satan's intervention in favor of our flesh. This happens in different ways. I would like to take a closer look at those which deal with forgiveness.

Satan uses the three points mentioned above against us in two ways. First he accuses us in situations in which we are especially in need of God's closeness, or rather God's help. He

talks us into believing that due to our lack of readiness to forgive we have absolutely no right to expect anything from God, let alone to receive anything from Him.

Secondly, after having finally brought ourselves to forgive, he intimidates us again with the accusation that we are hypocrites, because we may not *feel* like we have forgiven and least of all in a heartfelt manner.

That once again shows how deceptively Satan abuses our ignorance of biblical truths with destructive intentions in order to keep us from the freedom which Jesus has purchased for us through his sacrifice on the cross.

A Conclusion about Injustice and a Seeming Justification

Another aspect which also can have devastating consequences for our willingness to forgive is our sense of justice and the assumed sanctioning, that is, the implicit approval of injustice. This false understanding can influence our sense of justice in regard to forgiveness. Thus forgiveness is excluded as an intellectually viable path. Due to such false parameters it is only understandable that it seems impossible for us to forgive.

Next we want to define what forgiveness is and what marks the character of forgiveness:

Forgiveness is an act of obedience

The following Bible verse shows us the direction in which we should be moving. We have no other choice. As often as we need forgiveness, meaning mercy, we must also show mercy to those who have wronged us.

Matthews 6:12

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

God's word very clearly tells us that we must *first* forgive our debtors before we can turn to God in prayer. If we take God and his word seriously we will obey him and do as he commands. This way we make it clear that we don't love God with cheap words alone but that we are also prepared to follow his commandments, even when some things initially go against our grain. Let's look at how God's word leads us further into the process.

John 14:21

He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

John 14:23

Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

As we already recognized in other Bible passages we looked at, Jesus' instruction to his disciples was very clear and unambiguous. It is: Forgive!

You prove your love to me, when you keep the commands that I gave you. That would be the ultimate proof of having really comprehended the biblical declaration about love. For Jesus it is about doing what he taught us – love your neighbor. Certainly this neighbor can also be someone who sinned against you. Nevertheless—and precisely then—we must comply with the commandment of mercy.

Forgiving is an Act of the Agape-Love

1. Corinthians 13:4 -7

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

In contrast to our western, hellenistically-influenced culture, the Hebrew understands love to be an act and not—as we regard it in our cultural context—primarily a feeling.

Once we understand that God’s word was written with this backdrop, we can comprehend what God expects from us: to enforce his recommendations even if it means going against our feelings. So that we don’t have to blame ourselves for bad actions, we only have a completely different recourse left. If we don’t do that, we become bitter. Surely, this situation is not completely unknown to some of us. The only remedy to not let this bitterness arise is to forgive.

Forgiving is a character trait of God

Because he knows that we as humans sin again and again even if we don’t want to do it at all, we must fess up to who we are and what we have done. This is the only way God can be merciful and forgive us our sins and misdeeds.

1. John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Does it not speak in favor of God that he does not require of us what he is not prepared to do himself? In this respect he is not only an example for us, he is also the forerunner, because he has already paid the price for our sins. If we are willing to accept his offer, he is loyal and just—he forgives our debts and cleanses us from every injustice.

God loves to forgive people who humble themselves before him. It is rooted in his character to make the consequences of his plan of salvation accessible to everyone.

Summarizing:

- *Forgiving is not an act of justice*

- *Forgiving does not mean justification of guilt*
- *Forgiving is not in harmony with our feelings*
- *Forgiving is an act of our will*
- *Forgiving is an act of obedience*
- *Forgiving is an act of agape-love*
- *Forgiving is a character trait of God*

CHAPTER 5

I cannot forgive

Some think that, for a variety of reasons, they cannot forgive. Time and again I have found that people are prepared to forgive in most instances once they have understood God's concept of forgiveness and therewith choose the path to freedom.

Allow me to present a challenging theory and to substantiate it.

We are in a position to forgive every person everything that he could ever do to us – but we don't want to.

The lack of teaching leads God's people to suffering

Hosea 4:6

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge ...

In the context of this verse God is dealing with the priests and Levites. He accuses them of not properly instructing God's people in his word and law. But it would have been their duty to instruct the people in God's commandments, and to call attention to the consequences of sins, transgressions, and omissions. They have failed in this and God accuses them: Because you have not done this, my people do not know about the spiritual connections and consequences that omissions and transgressions of my commandments bring – that is why my people suffer from lack of insight.

In the healing and counseling ministries I encounter people who have a fundamentally wrong idea of forgiveness again and again. Sometimes it seems to me that these people are experiencing the same situation that Hosea laments. They suffer because they are not told with what practical steps and patterns of behavior they can respond to certain situations according to the divine plan.

In this respect forgiveness is a prime example. The ignorance on this topic is alarming and scary. I am sure that God's heart is bleeding because he sees the suffering of his children, who—imprisoned by Satan—are turned over to the torturers without any insight on how to escape the misery. How many have resigned and given up because of this, accusing God that he does not intervene, that he does not have mercy and that he does not bring about any solutions for needs, sufferings, illnesses and all the other problem areas.

When we look at the situation realistically, he already provided everything, just as his word clearly attests. Because it is exactly this that he accomplished on the cross of Calvary. For

our part, nothing can be added to what has already been done.

But now we have a problem that is most clearly evident in the question of why so many of his children suffer under Satan's oppressions and from illnesses. I don't want to sound unrealistic, but if all *is* already accomplished, then it cannot be God's fault. Therefore we should begin to search for the solution by examining *ourselves*. This is where the point regarding suffering due to a lack of insight comes to bear. The cause may be the adaptation, the deviance, the relativization but also the neglect of biblical truth. If year after year it is proclaimed that something happens in exactly such-and-such a way, then people begin to believe it. Doesn't God's word clearly state that faith comes from the preaching? - History shows us that a person's faith and action are governed by that which he or she is exposed to.

If we expose ourselves to a watered-down gospel, then we cannot expect to be healed, set free and renewed. Let us be aware that we only reap what we sow. No farmer expects to reap wheat when he planted potatoes. Why do we believe that we will reap what we were not prepared to sow? I think that it is high time to finally ponder these truths, since we want that much will be changed for the better regarding our spiritual lives.

Agape-Love vs. Free Will

We have already spoken at length about the fact that forgiveness is not an act of justice, but rather an act of love. *That* love which God has poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

1. Corinthians 13:5

Love (God's love in us) does not insist on its own rights or its own way, for it is not self-seeking; it is not touchy or fretful or resentful; it takes no account of the evil done to it [it pays no attention to a suffered wrong] (Amplified Version)

This love does not let itself be provoked by what others have done to us; this love does not hold other people who may have hurt us captive by their guilt. Peter writes about this love, when he says:

1. Peter 4:8

...for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.

We must allow that to sink in—that which God has equipped us with and what we can do with it. Through love—that is found in us and that comes from God—which is not focused on self, we can cover many sins. What mercy, what an opportunity to thank God that he permits us to be part of his essence in this manner.

Is that not in itself desirable and reason enough to train ourselves in this area? Surely agape remains in conflict with our flesh. However, once we have understood that we can use that which God has given us, that he has both planted the necessary desire in our hearts and that he also stands at our side during the outworking of it, nothing can keep us from really living

in agape.

Romans 13:10

Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

Who is the aggrieved party?

Hurts from others cause pain, especially when the perpetrators come from our family, our social networks, or our spiritual communities. That is understandable and to be expected. We don't understand the world anymore. Who can blame us if our basic sense of trust is broken and we feel as if the rug has been pulled out from under our feet. We then ask ourselves where our footing and our orientation have gone.

But have you ever asked yourself who is actually hurt when you are not prepared to forgive? Bear in mind that in many cases the culprit is not even aware that he has hurt you. Even if he is aware, he may not be bothered by it, or he may not care at all.

If you are honest with yourself, you will realize that, in the end, you are causing damage to yourself—and doing so in two ways: It is you who suffers from the injustice and you are adding to the wound by not forgiving.

Imagine that you are grieved, your conscience is bothering you and you bind yourself to the person who has indebted to you by refusing to forgive him. We have already stated that our unwillingness to forgive keeps us imprisoned and exposes us to the torturers. It is as if we actually chain ourselves to people and then wonder why every movement of theirs is painful for us. Because the wounds that have been inflicted on us break open anew with every single move that they make.

Through an unbiased analysis we can only come to the conclusion that we should free ourselves from these chains as quickly as possible and to find out how the situation can be changed to our favor. Do not continue to punish yourself. Have mercy on yourself, let go and come out of this self-imposed imprisonment!

Why we can forgive

God has equipped us with everything we need in order to forgive.

- *We are his children.*
His children are partakers of his character. We have his DNA. In the vernacular, one says: "The apple does not fall far from the tree." That is a truth, with which we have to get acquainted.
- *His love has been poured out in our hearts*
He bestows part of his character on us and gives us his love, which was poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

- *He gives us the desire and helps us in the outworking*

God wants us to be successful. Because he knows that we cannot accomplish anything without him, he has planted the seed of the desire in our hearts. He even waters it, so that we not only desire, but that we are also able to *do* what we desire.

Why God expects that we forgive

I think that we can answer this succinctly. He has equipped us with all we need in order to forgive and therefore he expects us to be obedient to him. Obedience, of course, is not always easy. But once we make the decision to be obedient, we will reap the *fruits* of obedience.

John 14:21

He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

John 14:23

Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

- *I will love him and reveal myself to him.*
- *We will come to him and abide with him.*

If we obey him, then he will manifest himself to us, we will begin to enter a deeper communion and intimacy with him. We think that *this* promise cannot be topped, but he manages to do it. Do you understand what he promises? To abide with you means to always stay with you. What else could we wish for?

Consequences of Refusal

We would simply exclude ourselves from godly blessings like love, joy, peace, and freedom, and instead get the miserable life of a fettered, tormented, unfree, and frustrated “Christian”.

Just as we can enjoy the fruit of obedience, we will have to swallow the fruit of disobedience. This is the exact opposite of what has been promised to us when we obey. In case of our refusal, love declarations become empty words that are not supported by any kind of actions, because we are missing the love of the father. Intimacy with Jesus and communion with the Holy Spirit we may know from books at best, but not from our own experience.

The incompatibility of our experiences with the promises of God seems to become our reality. It is surely not an exaggeration to say that desertion, uncertainty of our well-being, and frustration about our feeble, powerless and unvictorious life as Christians tortures us.

Why do question when that which God foretold finally happens? Why are we surprised when we have to bear the consequences for our actions? Does God not say in his word that he *keeps* what he promises? Let us not think that these declarations only apply to his “good” promises. No, his word is valid in every area: It also applies in those areas which may not be pleasant for us. To accuse God at the arrival of negative consequences is childish, since he clearly makes us aware of the consequences of our actions in his word. Both of the blessings as consequences of obedience as well as the consequences of disobedience, which release misfortune and curses upon our lives.

Consequence of breaching of the law

Why do we expect that *spiritual* principles do *not* apply to us and that we don't have to comply with these *spiritual* laws? Just as we cannot suspend nature's law of gravitation by using our imagination, we are not able to unhinge spiritual laws.

Let's imagine that we put the rule to the test: We go to the edge of a steep cliff and jump off with the expectation to fly. Our “flight” will inevitably end with a very rough landing. If God's established law of gravitation goes for everyone, why do we then believe that of all things the *spiritual* laws, which are of much greater importance for us, have no or only limited validity? Just as the violation of the law of gravitation punishes everyone who willfully ignores the law's validity, so will violations of spiritual laws carry with them tough consequences.

As long as we are not willing to forgive, tortures will have unrestricted access to our lives. We should not marvel when physical and psychological afflictions appear as a result of acts of destruction from anger and bitterness that can neither be explained nor treated, either medically or psychologically.

Jesus explained this in the parable with the servant when he said:

... and delivered him to the torturers, ...

We virtually do not have any possibility to work off this debt. The only way out is to go Jesus' way – the way of forgiveness.

What are torturers?

Matthews 18:34

And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the torturers, till he should pay all that was due unto him.

Let us take God's word seriously in this respect. When God says that he will hand us over to the torturers, we should first and foremost consider what that actually means. First, we should be clear about who torturers are. or rather what they do with those who are handed over. Torturers are rough, unscrupulous, violent, and often sadistically dispositioned people, who are rightfully outlawed from society. No one wants to have any dealings with them, not

personally and especially not in their specific field of work. Torturers do exactly that what their name says – they torture. This extends to both the physical and psychological planes in the use of force.

How often have I met people whose physical and emotional sufferings and needs moved everyone who came into closer contact with them to pity. They could absolutely not see a way out of their dilemma, because they were not able to draw upon Jesus' victory over sin, sickness, suffering and needs for their hopelessness. When we talk about torturers, I believe that they afflict each person in a completely different way. For some it may be about spiritual distress, problems, and bondages, while for others it may be psychological problems and for others the work of the torturers may express itself in physical, or rather psychosomatic discomfort.

One thing is for certain – God's word is and remains true. God has granted the torturers the right to afflict us as a consequence of our refusal to forgive. Should we not take his declaration seriously and do everything in our power, so that they are not permitted to assault us? I just cannot imagine that someone would be intent to lightheartedly expose themselves to the consequences of such a merciless trade. Actually, everyone should recognize that he has control over whether the torturers stay out of his life or whether he gives them legitimate access to it.

If we don't fulfill the condition of mutual forgiveness, we automatically step into the torture chamber—from which we cannot escape on our own. Our salvation does not mean that God drops his demand for us to pardon others. On the contrary –wholeness is conditioned on forgiveness.

No assurance of salvation

Working as a Christian counselor, I have seen innumerable people who accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Nevertheless, they were missing the certainty of salvation and the freedom that comes from this as Jesus promised in his word:

Matthews 6:14

For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

By the way, Jesus alerted us in two different places that our heavenly father forgives us, when we forgive. But he also tells us that he will not and cannot forgive us, when we refuse to forgive. If we are not forgiven because of our unwillingness to forgive others, then the Holy Spirit cannot confirm that we have been forgiven. The result is the unsettling uncertainty of whether we have received forgiveness. This is precisely what it means to live without the assurance of salvation.

Guilty conscience

Conscience means joint knowledge—the cognizance that has been granted to every person with regard to injustice and guilt. That is, within each person lives a confidant of his behavior. The conscience can also be understood as the voice of the inner man which stands up for or against him and judges his thoughts, or rather his actions.

Romans 2:15

Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;)

Romans 9:1

I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, . . .

Accordingly, the New Testament talks about an evil or good, that is a pure conscience. Precisely because of our consciousness of sin a cleansing from an evil conscience is essential.

1.Timothy 1:5

Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned:

Hebrews 10:22

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

A determining factor for the mode of operation of the conscience is the authority from which it draws in order to live before God according to his standards: among the heathen in the form of the inner knowledge of the law as a specified regulation (Rom 2.15), among the Christians in the form of the conscience.

When our conscience condemns us for knowing God's word but not obeying it, how can we expect our soul to find peace and quiet in God? Our conscience happens to be active and is not easily shut off. We may succeed in incapacitating it, but doing that does not leave us with a pure or a good conscience. We have simply chosen to not listen any longer to the warning inner voice.

1.Timothy 1:19

Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck:

Were we able to successfully still our conscience, then we will not only have to forget about peace and quiet but we will also have turned off our inner navigation system which shows us the way to God.

1.Timothy 4:2

Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;

Not infrequently do we pretend that we act correctly or justly, but do not recognize that we have already strayed. Simply stated, we deceive ourselves and pretend that everything

would have to turn out just the way we want it to. Meanwhile, we only repress reality and because of this we are branded by our conscience.

Lack of Joy

Not obeying the voice of God has as a sure consequence the loss of Jesus' joy. It is surely not an exaggeration to describe this loss as a falling out of one's "first love". We would experience the same thing as David.

Psalm 51:12

Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.

Through repentance and changing his ways, David did finally find his way back to the joy of salvation. For us, as well, this is the only path to come out of the bleakness and accusation which befalls us as soon as we have strayed from the way of salvation. Let us not forget God's promise in any case. God has entrusted us with mighty and dependable weapons so that we can walk successfully to the end. There is absolutely no reason and no necessity to relinquish these, because without the armament we would be exposed to Satan's attacks without any protection or defense.

Galatiens 5:22

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

Romans 15:13

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

No intimacy with Jesus

I think that the lack in closeness to Jesus is probably the first thing we become aware of. Our distance, which we also notice emotionally, cools our love toward Jesus down markedly. As an example I would like to consider a charcoal fire. Just like a piece of charcoal cools down slowly but surely once it is separated from the other glowing charcoal, the same will happen to us. Between us and Jesus a distance will develop if we are not willing to do *that* which he asks of us in his word. This distance inevitably causes our love for him to grow cold.

Once this process has begun we will need a lot more energy to get back to the place from where we started. So why do we put up with this extra effort involved, together with the loss of attention, recognition and security connected with it, as well as loss of time? After all, we have the opportunity to follow God's way right away by doing what he said.

Resignation

Who is not familiar with situations in their own life in which everything becomes too much, where we throw all good intentions overboard and eventually allow ourselves to drift? Surely

not everyone reacts this way but why have so many started on the way with Jesus only to disappear quietly?

I am confident that one reason is that they were not prepared to implement these discovered truths in their lives. Indeed they heard something about God's truths, but in the end it was hearing only and they did not act on them. God's word demonstrates clearly that it cannot remain at the "hearing only" stage.

If we are not prepared to implement what we heard, then the day is not far off when we will resign and turn our backs on Jesus, because we will experience the blessings which we were promised. In the process we disregarded that certain conditions must be fulfilled on our part as well.

Conclusion

If we become aware of all this, it is no longer logical to say—I *cannot* forgive. In fact, what we say is—I do not *want* to forgive!

In wrapping up we summarize:

Lack of teaching—leads to the suffering of God's people

When we expose ourselves to a watered-down gospel, we cannot expect that the power of God's message heals us, frees us and restores us. I think it is high time that we start thinking about these truths, since we all want to have a changes for the better in regards to our spiritual lives.

Agape love versus will

Surely agape continues to be in conflict with our flesh. Let us learn to apply what God has given us! He planted the needed willingness into our hearts and, on top of that, he helps us in the implementation—what more can we expect?!

Who is the victim?

Unbiased reflection can only lead to one result—that we should free ourselves as quickly as possible from these chains and find out how this situation can be changed to our favor. Don't keep punishing yourself. Be merciful to yourself, let go and come out of the self-imposed imprisonment!

Why can we forgive and why does God expect that we forgive?

We are his children and his children happen to be partakers of his nature. We have his DNA. That is the truth that we have to get comfortable with. He makes us partakers of his being, that is, his love, which is poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Consequences of refusal

Why do we actually wonder when that happens which God has foretold? Why do we wonder that we have to bear the consequences of our actions? God says in his word that he keeps what he promises. These statements apply not only to the “good” promises. His word is valid in every area, even those that may not be as pleasant for us.

Consequences of breach of law

Just as a breach of the law of gravity punishes everyone who purposefully ignores its validity, tough consequences will follow for those who ignore spiritual laws.

Torturers

If we don't fulfill the conditions of mutual forgiveness, we automatically deliver ourselves into the torture chamber, from which we cannot escape again in our own strength. Our conversion does not mean that God just drops his demand for us to have mercy on others. On the contrary – forgiveness is a condition for wholeness.

No assurance of salvation

If we are not forgiven because of our own unwillingness to forgive, then the Holy Spirit cannot confirm that we have been forgiven. The result is the grueling uncertainty whether we have been forgiven or not. In other words this means that we have to live without the certainty of having been saved.

Guilty conscience

Not infrequently do we fool ourselves to have acted correctly, or rather justly, but do not recognize that we are already mistaken. Simply stated, we lie to ourselves and pretend that everything should occur as we would like to have it. In this we merely displace reality and are branded by our conscience for this very reason.

Lack of Joy

There is absolutely no reason nor any necessity to abstain from joy, because not being equipped with joy would totally expose us to Satan's attacks.

No intimacy with Jesus

A distance grows between Jesus and us if we are not prepared to do that which he asks of us in his word. Inevitably this distance causes our love for him to slowly grow cold.

Resignation

Should we refuse to implement what we heard, then the day is not far off when we resign

and turn our backs on Jesus, because we will not experience the blessings which we were promised. In the process we ignore the fact that there are also conditions which we must fulfill.

CHAPTER 6

Removal of barriers to forgiving

We have understood that forgiving is not about feelings, but rather a matter of will and obedience. However, we might still have a problem in that our soul could decide against the decision to forgive and put us into a constant state of unrest. We know that forgiveness is not an act of justice but one of love and mercy, and emotional problems connected to forgiving are not out of the question.

Let's take a closer look at the individual problem areas.

Forgiveness does not mean that injustice is endorsed

We must become aware that the injustice that happened will not be sanctioned by being merciful toward the offender. Injustice is and remains injustice, even when it has been forgiven.

As an illustration, I want to give an example from my own experience. My wife and I visited Budapest in the late 1980's, in order to plan an event for evangelizing with the local churches there. I still remember a beautiful, sunny fall day, which literally called us to use a few free hours to go sightseeing. During our stroll we happened upon a very busy shopping street. It was there, that a thief must have taken all our cash from my wife's handbag. At any rate, the money set aside for this trip was gone.

We never met this person, but we forgave. We were merciful toward him or her, but that does not change anything about the injustice concerning the deed—which is and will continue to be wrong.

Injustice is also wrong in God's eyes

Just as this theft was wrong in God's eyes, so every injustice committed against you is reprehensible and deserves to be punished. At this point Jesus' death on the cross must enter the equation. And since we *all* have transgressed against God's commandments in some way, we are guilty without exception.

Hebrews 9:22

...and without shedding of blood is no remission.

Leviticus 17:11

For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.

Because guilt before God can only be redeemed and atoned through blood, we were headed for death, if Jesus had not taken all of our sins upon himself.

Please realize that not only the one who caused you wrong transgressed against God's commandments but you have also done so at times. And anyone who does this is brought to justice.

*Romans 6:23
For the wages of sin is death ...*

Let us banish the thought that we have not committed sins that are as terrible as those committed by others. That is way off the mark: What counts with God is whether we have kept his commandments or not. Nowhere in his word do we find a statement that gives us permission to step over the line by even a small amount.

Imagine that you are a marksman participating in a competition. The jury would not dream of discussing with you by how much you have missed the mark. When you missed the mark, you missed it. The criterion is solely whether you were able to hit the mark or not.

Back to the topic—because we are *all* actually guilty, we have no right to point the finger at others. Do not forget: If you point one finger at others, three fingers point back at you.

There is no law which we harken back to in order to accuse others, or rather to withhold from them the grace we have been granted. God expects from us that we forgive and leave the judging to him, even when he also considers whatever happened to us to be an injustice.

We should always be aware of the following: God can only deal with an injustice that happened to you, if you are willing to leave the matter to him. As a spiritual transaction, this happens when we forgive. Only forgiveness makes it possible for God to intervene in a specific situation and change it to good for both sides.

I extend grace to the person who has wronged me

To give grace means to humble yourself before God.

*1.Peter 5:5
... for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.*

God gives grace to the humble, yet resists the proud. Let us consider the consequences of this thought—it means that if we are not prepared to forgive, then we are not humble, and therefore God *resists* us. For my part, I would rather that *Satan* resists me and not the living God, because against *his* resistance there is *no* remedy.

Through grace I move to the side of the receiver and leave the position of judge to God, for whom it is exclusively reserved. I no longer sit on the throne and play God, but acknowledge

my dependence on the grace and love of God.

Let us always remember: By granting forgiveness, you have access to God's *grace* which never runs out. Grace brings life, joy, and peace. Grace saturates our daily grind with God's goodness.

Emotion and Forgiveness

In the previous section ... we have already talked about the "trinity" of a person. That is why I only want to illustrate the essence here to complete the picture.

Emotion and forgiveness are in themselves a contradiction. When we heed our feelings, we would probably never be prepared to forgive. In our feelings, we humans are decidedly erratic. The only unchanging entity of our being is our born-again spirit. And it alone has been charged by God to forgive. This assignment is to be carried out, despite the constant emotional negation.

Let us keep in mind: Forgiveness does not concern our emotions, rather it is a mandate to our new, born-again spirit. To complete this charge, bringing our will to obedience—through that we can clearly derive that forgiveness is an act of our will and obedience that completely goes against the grain of our wounded soul.

Justice and Forgiveness

As I see it, from these statements clearly emerges that justice is not dealt with satisfactorily through forgiveness. The concept of forgiveness simply does not contain any aspect of justice. Moreover forgiveness treats our fellow men only like we want to be treated. God's word clearly states:

Luke 6:38

For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.

As often as we for ourselves require to be forgiven, we are also asked to measure others with that same standard. God does not allow us to measure with differing, arbitrary standards. Those who do such things he calls hypocrites. Let's look at Jesus' continuous conflict with the Pharisees. Fundamentally, it aimed at nothing more than to take the wind out of the sails of their hypocrisy.

Luke 11:46

And he said, Woe unto you also, ye lawyers! for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers.

They placed burdens on the people which they themselves were not willing to carry and which were not intended in God's instructions.

Please pay close attention: Only by handing over the entire situation into God's hands, justice will be satisfied, because God *is* a just judge. However, the resolution of the situation

happens without *our* contribution.

Where there is a will, there is a way

“Forgive” is a command. To execute a command—that is a matter of obedience and the will. God tells us in a rather straightforward manner that, while we do not have to *feel* like it, we should do what he says. Our will is the deciding factor aside from the “motivator” of love which enables us, in the end, to practice forgiveness by obeying God’s word.

Summary:

- ***Forgiveness does not mean that I have to concur with the injustice***
To be merciful toward the offender does not mean that we excuse the injustice. Injustice is and remains injustice, even when it was forgiven.
- ***Injustice is also injustice in God’s eyes***
Every injustice done to you is also an injustice in God’s eyes and deserves to be punished.
- ***I grant grace to the person who has wronged me***
Always keep in mind: If you grant forgiveness then you ensure access to God’s grace. His grace does not run out. His grace always brings us new life, peace, and joy and his benevolence envelops us.
- ***Emotion and Forgiveness***
Emotion and forgiveness are within themselves a contradiction. If we were to give in to our feeling, we would most likely never be willing to forgive.

I repeat:

Forgiveness is not an act of emotion but an assignment for our new, awakened spirit. However, to complete an assignment means: “I must be willing to obey.”

CHAPTER 7

On the merry-go-round of emotions

One fundamental problem we have to fight is God's unmistakable direction in his word that we must forgive all, if we also want to be forgiven. This is why we must make ourselves aware that forgiveness is never based on feelings. Whether we forgive or not should not be left to our emotions.

Satan plays on the keyboard of our feelings

First he attempts to keep us from forgiving by deceiving us—with ever-changing reasoning—that we are not able to forgive. As long as we have not yet forgiven, he accuses us that we simply do not have the *right* to draw near to God, let alone to expect something from him, because we remain in a state of irreconcilability. Once we have seen through Satan's ruse and finally forgive, he uses that exact expression of forgiveness against us and tries to convince us that we have not forgiven, since our feelings would surely attest to the forgiving. This is one of his typical strategies: first the accusation, because we have not done the *right thing* and then, because we have not—according to his opinion—carried out the needed action in a right manner. In other words, we get stuck in a vicious cycle. The best strategy for overcoming is found in the word of God:

James 4:7

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Do not, under any circumstances, allow yourself to be lured into a fight, but rather submit yourself consciously to God. Take the determined step back into God's arms. In this secure setting you can resist and Satan will flee, not from you, but from God, whose presence he cannot stand. If you want to see Satan from behind, seek God's presence as soon as unrest overcomes you.

Back to dealing with emotions: Forgiveness is an act of our will and our obedience in regard to God's word. My feelings will most likely say to me that I cannot forgive something like that, because when I forgive it, it goes against justice. But the fact remains that forgiveness is not an act of justice but an act of love.

What to do, when your soul is going crazy

As we all certainly know a decision to forgive can put our emotions into a state of unrest. I certainly do not want to minimize this inner struggle or to rationalize it away. But we can explain to our soul during this time of distress that, by speaking forgiveness, we have done precisely what Jesus instructed. Based on this proclamation, our soul and our emotions will

eventually come to rest.

Furthermore it could be that you do not feel at all like you have forgiven. That is why patience is essential. Your soul needs time to comprehend that which you have spoken and to recognize that letting go has brought relief.

When I came to the USA for the first time in the early 70s, it seemed to me as if my soul remained at home. It was strange to me that I would get off the airplane in such different surroundings after an eight-hour flight. My brain, of course, perceived my new setting, but my soul was not able to keep pace with this fast change of place. It simply needed a lot more time to get used to the new surroundings.

This can happen to all of us when our soul feels exposed to a completely new situation. It really takes a bit more time until it opens up to the new, the unknown, and the challenging. So do not despair. As soon as the soul grasps that it is an advantage to not have to carry those burdens any longer, the grumpy feelings of “not being well” will disappear and relief and joy will spread.

CHAPTER 8

When you forgive others their sins

The far reaching consequences of forgiveness can be seen in the following passage:

John 20:23

Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.

Since this is the truth, the people whom we do not forgive what they have done to us, will not be forgiven in heaven. The moment I realized what this means, I saw the enormous responsibility, the challenge, but also the privilege of what the word of God contains for us and mankind.

Responsibility insofar as we could not allow ourselves to keep others in prison, since we have the ability and are authorized to set them free through forgiveness.

Challenge because we have to decide in the end, to set people free when we would often—according to our oh so human emotions—wish a much different fate. So again: It is irrevocably *your* decision what you want to do! Let us ask God to help us in all cases to do that which is expected of us.

And lastly, *privilege*, because we are allowed to set people free. Is that not a reason to marvel? God trusts you and me—us—to act like *he* would act. God puts his trust in us: it is a downright breathtaking privilege.

Jesus – our role model

The Scriptures say that we should listen to Jesus's words.

Matthews 17:5

... This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.

He, Jesus, has been given to us as a role model for all areas of our life. Certainly one tries to emulate his or her role model and that in every facet. Nothing is excluded. Everything that the role model did is relevant. No exceptions and no variations are justified when the actions of the role model are showing the way.

John 13:15

For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.

John 12:26

If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve

me, him will my Father honour.

Jesus teaches that what happened to *him* will also happen to *us* and that what *he* did we should do also. He preached the good news and commissioned us to also preach the good news. *He* healed and asked *us* to heal; he cast out demons and commissioned *us* to cast out demons; he wakened the dead and commissioned *us* to wake the dead. He forgave people their sins and expects *us* to also forgive the sins done to us.

We should not try to excuse ourselves by saying that Jesus was the son of God and was able to rely on his supernatural, divine strength: Here on earth he was man by his own free will and submitted to the limitations of being human. He had the same authority as you and me.

He was exposed to every temptation, familiar with all suffering, and experienced every possible rejection.

John 1:11

He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

He, the creator, came to his creation and his own creation rejected him, did not want to have anything to do with him and got rid of him in the most disgraceful and gruesome way.

He who had had all the reason to destroy us, blessed us. From his life, a stream of blessing broke forth, that continues to touch people from the beginning to the end of time and enables them to come back to the originally intended communion with God.

Luke 6:28

Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.

Despite all of the reprisals that were brought against him, he, the Almighty, preached about loving one's enemies. He taught us to bless those who curse us and to pray for those that insult us. A wise appeal but not easy to digest. Again and again words of blessing and of love, but no curse, no judgment. That is his legacy.

He blessed, he prayed and he showed us through his actions how we could emulate him. He established the law of love, lived accordingly and challenges us to also put into action the commandments he gave us. Our challenge lies in that we should not only love with words: Our words should be followed by our deeds.

The prayer that changed the world

If we did not look at one of the shortest prayers ever spoken, then this book would fall short. Because this is the prayer with—most likely—the greatest impact of all times. Jesus prayed for you and me on the cross.

Luke 23:34

Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.

Let us pause for a moment and think about why Jesus spoke this particular prayer. Moreover we must be clear about what actually brought Jesus to the cross. It was the sin for which there is no atonement without the shedding of blood. God's word teaches us that no one is righteous, not one.

*Romans 3:10
There is none righteous, no, not one ...*

If no one is righteous, then you and I are not righteous either. And because this is so, you and I have missed the mark that God intended for us and we are *sinner*s. And because we are sinners, it is without question that our sins were nailed to the cross with Jesus.

Suddenly this concept of "atonement" takes on a very personal note. Jesus took our place on the cross when he asked his father not to count the sins against those who had nailed him to the cross.

I don't like to begin to imagine what would happen to us, had Jesus *not* said that prayer. According to his word this sin would have been held against us.

*John 20:23
Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.*

*Matthews 18:18
Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*

Without Jesus's prayer, we would really not have any chance at a life with him and in him, but would have been excluded from the glory. We would have nothing to do with eternal life, nothing to do with the bride, nothing to do with the lamb's wedding and nothing to do with eternal joy. Instead we would be expecting weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Here, as well, Jesus became our forerunner. He lived out the answer for us. Because of our role model Jesus, we can simply ask the heavenly father not to hold the sins, that others committed against us, against them.

This much is clear: Jesus' prayer was *our* only chance to be free. Out of our thankfulness for having been redeemed, we should also release others.

We are living as children of our heavenly father and as children of this rank we are simply obligated to follow Jesus as our role model. Think about it—as a child of God you have the father's DNA and can simply act according to that genetic make-up. Like father, like son—says the proverb.

*1.Peter 4:8
And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.*

It is of this that Peter spoke when he mentioned that love covers a multitude of sins. It would only make sense to take the option offered to us and use that which God has given us for ultimately blessing others, wouldn't it?

When we have decided to act in this way, then we have internalized this concept and let others be a part of the blessings in our lives

Ephesians 4:32

And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Summary - Jesus our role model

Jesus is our ultimate role model for all areas of our lives. One tries to imitate a role model in every respect. Nothing is excluded. Everything that the role model did is relevant.

He told the good news and commissioned us to be witnesses to the good news. He healed and commissioned us to heal; he cast out demons and commissioned us to cast out demons; he raised the dead and commissioned us to raise the dead. He forgave people their sins and commissioned us to forgive people the sins they committed against us.

CHAPTER 9

Last but not least – you personally

A young man murdered another man who was about his own age. He appeared before a judge and expected to get the worst sentence—the death penalty. During the trial, the father of the murdered son suddenly spoke and asked the judge to be merciful to the man who had murdered his son. He even went as far as asking the judge to give him custody over this man. Naturally, the judge was rather surprised by this request and asked the father for his reasons.

His answer was as simple as it was incredible: “The defendant took that which was most dear to me. But punishing him would not bring back my son. Instead, the defendant would also lose his life. Because of that, I would like to receive him as part of my family and let him know what the love of a father means for a son. This may help the young man and it would help me, because I would have a son again. Your Honor, he said in closing, it is because of this that I ask you to forgo sentencing him.”

The judge had to make a decision, whether he would sentence the defendant to be executed or whether he would acquiesce to the father’s wishes. After having thought about it for a long time, he showed mercy to the young man.

That is as far as the story goes. The sentence was not legally binding yet, since the young man had not made up his mind yet of whether he wanted to accept the mercy which was extended to him. Only by saying YES would the verdict to give him his freedom come into effect.

Can you imagine the tragedy if the young man—no matter what the reason—would decide to reject the mercy which was offered to him? With his rejection he would automatically choose the alternative to mercy and decide on his own death. Not, because he was forced to, but because he wanted it that way.

So why did I tell you this story? Just as the judge offered the young man mercy, so does our heavenly father offer us mercy. However, there is no escaping: This will only take effect if we also accept this offer of mercy. This acceptance happens by agreeing to the terms and conditions, just like with the young man in our story.

It is important for us that we step out of the self-accusations, the self-reproach, and the false humility, in order to thankfully accept the mercy offered to us. And how about you forgiving yourself? Have you ever thought about it, that it is also necessary to forgive yourself for all the sinful self-reproaches that you have carried around with yourself for all this time?

What does God's forgiveness do for us, if we are not prepared to also forgive ourselves and therefore accept the proffered mercy.

God, against whom we all have sinned, forgives us. If we don't forgive ourselves because we believe that we cannot accept God's offer, then we declare that Jesus' sacrifice was not sufficient for us.

It does not matter at all

- *who you are*
- *that you cannot contribute one bit to allow God's forgiveness to take effect and*
- *whether you find yourself worthy or not.*

In any case, God does not have another way to offer mercy other than the one which Jesus has taken. His offer stands, you can accept or not. It is *your* decision, and that with all consequences: either life in fullness or death.

God presents you with what he understands as life, because Jesus paid the price for you. Only because of that he can forgo the punishment and offer you this act of grace instead and accept you as his son or daughter. The question which we have to answer is actually simple: Are we prepared to accept this offer of mercy without any conditions? Are we furthermore prepared to clear the way so that we can come into the freedom which has been offered to us? Or are we hindered by various religious ideas like: "I am not worthy, therefore I cannot accept it." This really means that this is not enough for *me*, God's offer is not sufficient.

Let us say that no convicted offender is worthy; we are all convicted because we have sinned against God. The trait of mercy is that it can only be granted to a *legally* convicted person. And he / she must in turn be ready to accept.

Ask God for forgiveness and forgive yourself. By doing so you honor God, because you face up to who you are and you allow God's mercy to take effect in your life.

CHAPTER 10

Forgiveness in a practical way

Information comes before each action that is what God's word teaches us. Having now informed ourselves, we have weighed the pros and cons and surely recognized that there is no other way for us to experience the freeing power of the good news than to be obedient to God's word.

Romans 2:13

For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.

It would be unfortunate, if we only worked this out theoretically but would not have drawn any consequences which are long overdue and absolutely necessary. Giving short instructions I would like to show the individual practical steps which are necessary to warrant forgiveness and to gain the freedom which Jesus promised us.

Matthews 6:12

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

The Seven Steps of Forgiveness

The bible teaches us that we should forgive. Jesus never said that we must feel like forgiving. Therefore we must become active.

1. Make the decision to forgive.
2. Recall what forgiveness is and what it isn't!
3. Repent because of your irreconcilability.
4. Forgive the person(s).
5. Forgive yourself.
6. Ask Jesus to heal your broken heart.
7. Keep a forgiveness diary.

1. Decide to forgive

Write down exactly which sins you want to forgive whom. Should you have problems with that ask Jesus for mercy and help. Please remember:

John 15:5

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

2. Recall the following facts

- Forgiving is a matter of will and obedience.
- Forgiving is not an act of justice, but an act of love.
- Forgiving is in conflict with your soul and your feelings.
- Forgiving is not a justification for sins done to you.
- Injustice will not be made right because of forgiveness.
- Also for God injustice will not be made right through forgiveness.
- Through forgiveness you are merciful to others.

3. Repent because of your irreconcilability

- For reproaching God that God did not stop what happened to you.
- Should you for some reason not have forgiven a person, repent that you were not obeying God's word.
- Ask God for forgiveness that you have taken the seat as judge and that you have kept other people imprisoned in their sin.
- Ask God that he should cleanse you from every unrighteousness and every sin in regards to the neglected forgiveness which you now want to grant.
- Ask the Holy Spirit for help and call him as a witness of this act of forgiveness.

4. Forgive the respective person(s)

- Pray the written request to forgive.
- Grant the person forgiveness.
- Ask the Heavenly Father not to hold the debt against the person who has sinned against you.

- Ask the Heavenly Father to bless the person – be very specific in your blessings.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to fix the fact that you have finally forgiven deep in your heart.

5. Forgive yourself

Ask God that you can accept his forgiveness and grant yourself forgiveness.

6. Ask Jesus to heal your broken heart

- The fact alone that we forgive something entails that people have done wrong to us. This is very often accompanied by deep inner injuries. After we have forgiven, it is advisable to ask Jesus to heal the wounds inside us.
- Quite frequently we suffer from a shock because of the injustice done to us and were traumatized. It can happen that people can be downright terrorized by remembering such occurrences.
- In this case it is appropriate to pray specifically in order to remove shock, trauma, and terror from soul and body, from thinking, speaking, and doing.
- In addition to that it would be good that you ask Jesus that you can also feel the forgiveness.
- You can find appropriate prayers in chapter 12.

7. Next steps

Keep a diary of forgiveness in which you note down what you forgave whom when. This entry should contain the following:

- Name of the person
- The offence – and the forgiveness
- The blessing which you have spoken over the person
- Date
- Your signature

CHAPTER 11

Now it is up to you

Romans 2:13

For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.

Matthews 7:24 - 27

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:

And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.

And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:

And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

God's word speaks about wise people who hear his word and want to do his word and about the foolish ones who don't do his word even though they hear it and know what he expects.

When we meditate on this parable, we realize the enormous tragedy. Building on sand takes as much material, the same amount of time and energy and uses the same amount of effort as for a house that is built on solid ground. The question which we have to answer is the following: Do we want to build on *solid* ground, do we want to use the resources sustainably which we use for the house of our lives or do we still believe that it pays to have a faulty, botched construction job?

Unfortunately, the bible teaches us that one day our knowledge will accuse us. That this will become true we can already foresee by looking at the apparent ignorance of the foolish builder in the above mentioned bible passage. In the end every insight we have gained and not implemented will convict us.

Luke 6:46

And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?

Why do you call me Lord, what gives you the right to call me as the one who I really am – namely the one who tells you what should be done – and still you are not willing to do it. We always have problems with understanding what it actually means to call Jesus Lord. “Lord” is still a person of authority who tells us what needs to be done and we, the subordinates, simply have the responsibility to do what the authority says, by exactly following their instructions. The following example may be more comprehensible to us. You are working in a

branch for an international company in a managerial position. One day the company's boss calls you into his office and explains to you that he wants to give you a task which will secure the future of this particular branch. He gives you precise instructions which must be followed at all costs, dealing with timely matters as well as tried and true procedures which must be put into action. Your boss makes it crystal clear to you that there are no alternatives for the route he gave you. You take on this project and agree to complete everything the way he wants it to be done. After that he says good-bye and flies back to the company's head quarters. But what happens instead? Suddenly, in the middle of the project, you don't feel like completing the tasks at hand by following the instructions you had received prior. You begin to do things the way you want to do them and miss certain deadlines. Exactly that which your boss feared takes place. This branch cannot exist any longer like this and must be closed. Now back to the participants. Your boss had told you what would happen if.... He was looking for someone to work with him. You had agreed to help him and to follow through using his directions.

Let's reflect. You partially went your way and for some reason started to do things as you saw fit. Little by little it proved that the project could not be completed this way. The consequences are apparent. True, you worked and you completely invested in this project, you have worked overtime, sacrificed weekends and holidays. But for what? Despite all this the company could not survive – and that for one reason: You did your own thing and passed the actual conceptual formulation by. That is the tragedy I wanted to illustrate.

Exactly, as shown in this example, you too were assigned this particular, precisely defined task, namely to build the house of your life according to *his* instructions. By turning to Jesus you have accepted his conditions. Concerning this matter there is no partial acceptance, either you are a Christian with all the consequences it entails or you live your own life: But then you forgo everything that God has granted those who obey his word.

Of course it is not and cannot be my intention to burden you by any means or discourage you with my words. But my job is simply to make Jesus' offers palatable to you, yet without suppressing the consequences which we are exposed to when we decide against the path God has shown us.

I want to encourage you! Do not let yourself be thrown by the small things, as drastic as they may seem to us. You have started out well, therefore also finish the race according to his rules and the crown of victory will be yours. Don't stop, continue running and don't forget: Jesus prayed for you and wants to have you to be with him. Finally, the best thing I can tell you is: Stay in his presence, stay connected to the source of life who nourishes you, guides you and lets you be fruitful.

John 15:5

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

And if we cannot do anything without HIM, then we certainly should not even try to want to do anything without HIM.

CHAPTER 12

Helpful Prayers

Prayer of repentance for your irreconcilability¹

- Lord Jesus, I repent for my irreconcilability, which bore bitterness and resentment. I take full responsibility and ask that you forgive and cleanse me – in Jesus' name.

This prayer at the beginning aims at every "seized right" which someone gave to God's enemy at some point in time by opening a door for him in some way whether consciously or subconsciously.

- Lord Jesus, I repent that I have consciously or subconsciously, willingly or unwillingly, passively or actively allowed the spirit of irreconcilability, bitterness, and resentment to influence me – my body, soul, and spirit through my thinking, speaking, and doing. Thank you Jesus for your cross and that my sins are forgiven through your sacrifice and I am therefore cleansed in your name.

Whether we are aware or not, whether we participated or not: Jesus paid for all of my sins by dying on the cross – for the past sins, the current ones, or the ones in the future. I have been forgiven! I am cleansed. Satan hates most our repentance from our sins and our asking for forgiveness.

- This also includes that I was angry at you, God, and I bore a grudge that you allowed this in my life.

¹ adapted from Art Zeilsta

Prayer of forgiveness for sin which was done to you.²

- I forgive (*name the person*) that he (she) sinned against me (*be specific*), and release him/ her from my accusation.
- I place the cross of Christ between me and (*name all persons*). In the name of Jesus Christ I command all resentment and bitterness to end at the cross of Jesus Christ. I ask that freedom and healing flows toward me from the cross of Christ. Lord Jesus, fill my life with your peace, your joy, and your rest.
- I ask you holy father that you do not hold the sins against (*name the person*) any longer. I set (*name the person*) free, (*name the person*) does not owe me anything anymore.
- I bless (*name the person*) with all favor, success on all levels and wish that (*name of person*) will experience your blessings.
- Dear heavenly father, I ask you that you have people cross path with (*name the person*) who will tell (*name the person*) about you.]
- Please open (*name the person*)'s hear so that (*name the person*) can believe your love and accept you as Lord.

² adapted from Dr. Mark and Patti Virkler

I forgive myself and accept the grace that is offered to me.

- I confess and repent that I have not accepted your grace.
- This includes that I was angry with you, God, and held a grudge against you about many things. I blamed you for problems that weighed heavily on my life. Please forgive me and cleanse me from this sin.
- I forgive myself for all the sins that I have committed against you and my fellow human beings. I make the decision today to accept the grace which you are offering me.
- I place the cross of Christ between me and all those sins that I have committed.
- I command in your name – all resentment and all bitterness to end at the cross of Jesus Christ and thank you that freedom and restoration flow from there to me.
- Lord Jesus, please fill my life with peace, joy, and rest.
- I thank you Lord Jesus for the cleansing through your holy blood and for the forgiveness of all my sins.

Shock – Trauma – Fear and Terror³

Lord Jesus I ask that by the power of the Holy Spirit you would remove all natural shock, trauma, fear and terror of:

- The cells of my body.
- My organs (*you can name all the individual organs that are weak or sick*)
- My muscles, ligaments, tendons, joints, cartilage, bones, and bone marrow.
- My blood stream and my DNA.
- My nervous system from the stem of my brain to my nerve endings.

I ask Lord Jesus that you would pour your oil of healing into my nervous system.

- My mind, on the conscious level, the subconscious level and the unconscious level.
- My emotions, my will, my identity and my spirit
- All non-cognitive and pre-verbal memories
- All cognitive and verbal memories
- My Amygdala, my Hypothalamus and my Limbic-System please return them to their natural functioning states, turning off the alarm systems and the hyper vigilance with in me.

I ask Lord Jesus that you would receive all the silent screams from my body.

I ask that you would turn off the fight and flight response with in me.

I ask Lord Jesus that you would bring my hormones and my body chemicals into balance.

I ask that you would restore the brain to its natural homeostasis and that you would establish new neurological connections to the joy center.

Lord Jesus I ask that you would fill my cells with your peace, your love, your joy. Please bring the body to a place of rest. I ask all of this in Jesus holy name.

Amen

³ adapted from Art Zeilstra and Janet Howden