

CHAPTER 5

PREPARATION STAGE TWO – FORGIVING OTHERS

¹*“Do not judge, so that you will not be judged. ² For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.*

Matthew 7:1-2 (NASB)

¹² *There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?*

James 4:12 (ESV)

²⁹ *Do not say, “I will do to him as he has done to me;
I will pay the man back for what he has done.”*

Proverbs 24:29 (RSV)

¹³ *Before the Lord, for He is coming,
For He is coming to judge the earth.
He will judge the world in righteousness,
And the peoples in His faithfulness.*

Psalms 96:13 (NASB)

⁷ *“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*

Matthew 5:7 (RSV)

³¹ *because He has set a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all people by raising Him from the dead.”*

Acts 17:31 (NASB)

¹⁶ *on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of mankind through Christ Jesus.*

Romans 2:16 (NASB)

²⁵ *And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you for your offenses. ²⁶ But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your offenses.”*

Mark 11:25-26 (NASB)

Having got the person to repent fully and sincerely, then focus next on getting them to forgive other people.

As we saw, the sins we commit, especially major sins, create openings into our lives which demons then ruthlessly exploit and rely upon to give them a legal right to remain. I liken it to creating a “*tenancy agreement*” which, as in ordinary landlord and tenant law, prevents them being evicted. That is why we need to focus on “*cancelling those tenancy agreements*” by getting the person to repent of each of the sins which created the right of occupation in the first place.

I regret to say similar problems arise when a person refuses to forgive others who have wronged them in the past and when they harbour resentment, bear grudges, nurse their bitterness and seek for personal vengeance. Such unforgiveness and bitterness will be taken advantage of by the demon and used to gain access to the person's body in the same way as when a person commits serious sins themselves.

The resentment, nursing of grudges and longing for revenge will create the same kind of 'tenancy agreements' referred to above and give the demon(s) a legal right to remain in the person, such that the demon is within his legal rights to stay and will ignore you when you command him to depart.

He can validly wave his 'tenancy agreement' at you and say: "*I don't have to go anywhere while this unforgiveness continues*". And sadly, the demon would be correct. He has a legal right to remain until the person truly forgives the people who have wronged him.

There is a difference between forgiving fellow Christians who are genuinely saved and forgiving unbelievers who are not saved

So, we are going to look at how the person needs to forgive others who have wronged them in some way. But before we get much deeper into that I must point out that there is a difference between forgiving *fellow Christians* who are genuinely saved on the one hand and forgiving *unsaved unbelievers* on the other. If we don't understand the different rules that apply to forgiving Christians and non Christians we will get very confused.

The point is more is expected of us in forgiving a fellow Christian, whom God Himself has already forgiven, than when we forgive a non Christian whom God has not forgiven. Such a person will, unless he repents, be judged and punished at the Great White Throne judgment and sent to the Lake of Fire.

As we shall see in the passages that follow, the bar is set quite low in terms of what is required of us in forgiving an unbeliever. We basically just need to step aside and hand him over to be judged and punished by Jesus instead of being judged and punished by us. So, there is no duty upon us to "write off the debt" owed to us by an unbeliever, whether that is a literal financial debt or a metaphor for some other sin, wrong or crime, committed against us.

The point is we do not need to write off that "debt" (or wrong) because God Himself has not written it off. He still fully intends to deal with it and to punish the wrongdoer for it – because the wrongdoer is (as yet) unsaved and therefore he is still facing God's wrath when he dies.

But with a *saved person* who is a genuine Christian and *part of the Church*, whose sins have all been washed away by God, it would be a contradiction if we were to hold on to that sin he committed against us and not forgive it. It would place us in a different position towards that person than God is in, as he would be forgiven and washed clean in God's eyes but remain guilty in ours.

Quite apart from that, it would also amount to *hypocrisy, ingratitude and unequal treatment* on our part because we would be expecting God to forgive us for what *we have done* to sin against Him, and other people, but at the same time, continuing to hold fellow Christians accountable and guilty for the things *they did* to wrong us.

God will not only be angry with us for that hypocrisy and ingratitude. The Bible tells us He will also punish us for it by sending "*torturers*" and handing us over to them so they can make our life a misery for failing to forgive other Christians in the same way that God forgave us. This sounds strange, and

even harsh, but it is in the Bible and it was Jesus Himself who said it, so we have to take it seriously and deal with it.

A passage from Matthew helps to illustrate this point about how a demon or “*torturer*” will be sent by God into the life of a Christian who will not forgive fellow Christians. The metaphor used in this passage is of a large financial debt owed by person A to his master, person B.

He is forgiven that large debt by his own master, person B, but person A then refuses to forgive a much smaller debt owed to himself by person C. So, he himself is forgiven a large debt but he refuses to forgive someone else for a small debt.

However, although the metaphor used in the parable is of a financial debt, it is meant to represent all sins and wrongs that Christians commit against each other. In the narrower setting of the Church, where the dispute is between two *genuine* Christians, God has set the forgiveness bar higher.

He therefore expects us to forgive the person completely in the sense of “writing it off”, “cancelling the debt”. That basically means us viewing the fellow Christian in the same way God sees them, as washed clean and no longer facing His judgment for that sin at the Great White Throne.

The parable below reveals the alarming fact that our failure or refusal to forgive others in the Church can result in a “*torturer*”, being sent to torture us as a result of not forgiving a fellow Christian. That torturer can surely only be a demon. I can’t imagine what else it could be. Let’s examine the parable:

²³ *“For this reason the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴ And when he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. ²⁵ But since he did not have the means to repay, his master commanded that he be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment be made. ²⁶ So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.’ ²⁷ And the master of that slave felt compassion, and he released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay back what you owe!’ ²⁹ So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, ‘Have patience with me and I will repay you.’ ³⁰ But he was unwilling, and went and threw him in prison until he would pay back what was owed. ³¹ So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their master all that had happened. ³² Then summoning him, his master said to him, ‘You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴ And his master, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he would repay all that was owed him. ³⁵ My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.”*

Matthew 18:23-35 (NASB)

Within this parable, the two slaves both have the same master, who is also the King. There is therefore a connection between them as they are both part of the same group. Likewise, all of us who are part of the Church are connected as we have the same LORD and belong to the same group – provided of course we are *real Christians and genuinely saved*. If not, then there is no such connection between us. That is a vital point and must not be overlooked.

Therefore, I emphasise right at the start that this enhanced duty to forgive fellow Christians more fully than we forgive the unsaved only applies *if they really are Christians and not if they aren't*. The problem is that, especially today in the apostate West, there are millions of “churchgoers” who are not saved, not genuine and not part of the real Church. Therefore, many people who might seem to be part of the Church because they attend meetings are not in fact members of it as they are not really saved.

That then creates a complication as to how we are meant to handle them and whether the enhanced duty to forgive still applies to phoney churchgoers who only seem to be Christians on the surface, by appearances but are not actually saved. I don't think it does. Therefore, they should be treated as we would treat an unbeliever because that is what we believe they really are after weighing them up (diakrino) as we are repeatedly commanded to do with everyone we meet.

I believe the importance of this enhanced duty to forgive real Christians means that we are allowed, and indeed required, to assess and evaluate fellow “churchgoers” to form a view as to whether they are genuine or not. God does not want us to be naïve or gullible and to accept that anyone who calls himself a Christian is a genuine believer. That would be absurd and would contradict everything else that the Bible tells us about the need for discernment.

Nothing is to be assumed. It would not be wise or safe to do so. Neither are we to be told what to think. So nobody, not even a leader, has the right to tell us that Person A is a genuine Christian. It is solely your job and your right to make that assessment, based on your own discernment.

We must use our own individual discernment and form our own view of people. How else could it be done? We therefore have no alternative but to weigh people up for ourselves, as the only other option is to take everyone at face value and treat anyone as a genuine Christian just because he claims to be - even if, in your opinion, the evidence points to him being phoney.

Therefore, please don't make the mistake of assuming we must treat all “churchgoers” as if they were genuine Christians simply because they say they are, or because others say they are. Only a fool would do that and God does not want us to be fools. Nevertheless, some people are genuine Christians and some of them might sin against us or wrong us, intentionally or otherwise. And we might sin against them. Either way, the parable in Matthew 18:23-35 comes into operation and we need to apply it.

Therefore, we need to get a clear understanding of our duty here, *towards genuine Christians*, so that we do not cause God to have to respond to us as the King did to the unforgiving servant in the parable. We could then find ourselves being ‘tortured’ by demons who are given liberty to harass us more severely than they are already entitled to.

We need to work on this, therefore, and get in the habit of forgiving genuine fellow believers when they wrong us in small ways and practice putting up with them graciously when they irritate us which is inevitable. God requires that of us, but He also requires it of our fellow Christians when we wrong them or irritate them, as is equally bound to happen.

So, it cuts both ways. If we practise this regularly over small day to day irritations we will get good at it and be ready and able to forgive bigger wrongs when they arise, as they are bound to, because we are all sinners at different levels of maturity. Therefore, we all mess things up regularly, or at least we do in our early years as a believer.

You very rarely hear this passage Matthew 18:23-35 being preached on in churches. But, even if it is, the “torturers” are not mentioned or if they are, they are explained away and not taken literally. People don’t like the idea that God would not only allow, but even send, demons to ‘torture’ us in this way if we refuse to forgive a fellow Christian. It doesn’t fit into most people’s image of God or their theology.

Nevertheless, the passage is there in the Bible and can’t be avoided. Moreover, it came out of Jesus’ own mouth as His own teaching. So, we had better face it, deal with it and take it seriously because it was a very serious and worrying thing for Him to say and it would be most unwise to ignore it.

What if the wrongdoer is an unsaved unbeliever who is not part of the Church or is a phoney “churchgoer”, not a real Christian?

We have looked at how God expects us to forgive *fellow Christians* (real ones) to a high standard and how high He sets the bar. However, what if the person who has wronged us is *not a Christian* at all? Or, what if he is just a phoney “churchgoer” who attends churches but isn’t genuine and isn’t saved and therefore is not part of the Church with a capital C, the body of Christ?

The answer is there is still a duty to forgive but the bar is set much lower and far less is required of us. That has to be the case because there are many other verses in the Bible which speak of forgiving other people and of not “*judging*” them, which is a topic that is directly linked to the issue of forgiving. Yet these verses do not match up with Matthew 18:23-35 and it is quite clear that very different demands are being made of us when it comes to forgiving the unsaved.

That is to say these other verses which relate to forgiving unbelievers do not speak of us writing off the debt or completely forgiving the wrongdoer absolutely, in the same way that God has completely forgiven every saved person. That is because God hasn’t forgiven the unsaved, because they are, at present, still unrepentant and unbelieving. Therefore, He does not ask us to do towards the unsaved something which He Himself is not willing to do.

Let’s therefore look at some of these other passages which are about how we are required to forgive *unsaved unbelievers*. They basically mean that we are to refrain from judging them. As I said, not “judging” is directly linked to the issue of forgiving, at least in the context of the unsaved. So, we will look at some of these passages but we will also need to look at the definition of the word “*judge*” in this context.

That too is essential if we are to avoid confusion because the Bible uses more than one Greek word which ends up translated into one multi-purpose English word “to judge”. That is why, as you may have noticed, the Bible seems to contradict itself because there are passages which:

- a) *forbid us to judge anybody*
- b) *command us to judge everybody*

The solution to the apparent contradiction is simple. It is that two different Greek words are mainly used, both of which (unhelpfully) are translated into the same English word to ‘judge’. So, the type of judging we are forbidden to do is to *kreetace*, which means usurping Jesus’ role as judge of the whole world.

It means to effectively put on His robes and sit on His judicial bench and to purport to render judgments about other people in terms of how blameworthy they were for a particular sin or wrong and what punishment they ought to receive for it.

Not only are we not qualified or worthy to form such judgements but they would also be made prematurely because God has set a day for Jesus (not us) to judge the world and that day has not yet come. Therefore, some of the people whom we might prematurely and illegitimately judge might repent and be saved before that terrible day comes. If so, they will be judged on a totally different basis, at a different time, and in a different place at the Judgment Seat of Christ which, likewise, only Jesus is qualified to conduct.

All of that is exclusively Jesus' personal territory. Only He is qualified, authorised and sufficiently knowledgeable to work out all of the complicated details in regard to each sin and to properly understand each person's life, including their background, the advantages and disadvantages they had, any mitigating factors which reduce their guilt and any aggravating factors which compound it.

To be able to work out all of that, plus much more, on a totally separate basis in every person's life and to do it with razor sharp accuracy and with exactly the right blend of justice and mercy would require a computer bigger than anything that exists on Earth. That is why only Jesus *can* do it and only Jesus is *allowed* to do it.

For anybody else to do it would be to *usurp* His role, which is a major offence. Actually, it is a blasphemy, since stepping into His role implies that you are making yourself equal to Him. That is one reason why it angers God and why He forbids us to do it.

So, the relevance this has to forgiving others, which I will expand upon below, is that forgiving an *unbeliever* who still faces judgment at the Great White Throne judgment only involves us stepping aside. It means leaving it entirely up to Jesus to make all those complicated judgments without any interference from us and without us donning His judicial robes now and usurping His role by forming a judgment (of the kreetace type) for ourselves.

However, there is another very different type of judging which we *are allowed to do*, indeed which we are *commanded to do*. This type of judging does not involve usurping Jesus' role as the ultimate Judge of the whole world. This type of judging is expressed by the Greek word *diakrino*.

It means, to begin with, the vital need we all have to *assess, evaluate, check and test* the teachings of other men, i.e. what they preach and what they write so that we can decide *whether they are biblical* or not. If we didn't do that, how could we ever choose whom to believe, whom to fellowship with and whom to listen to?

However, it goes far beyond just assessing their theology and also requires us to weigh up other men's *actions* and their *characters* to decide whether they can be trusted. That includes deciding whether they are genuine Christians or false ones, and whether we think they are mature enough to trust them to run a house group or to drive the youth group around in the minibus and so on.

There are hundreds of such assessments and evaluations that we have to make if we are to protect ourselves, our families and the people in our churches from being deceived, harmed or exploited. But there is nothing improper, presumptuous or blasphemous in any of this and it does not constitute

‘usurping’ Jesus’ role as the Judge of all the Earth. On the contrary, we engage in diakrino type judgements in obedience to God’s commands.

So, to be clear, we are *forbidden* to judge others in the sense of ‘*kreetace*’ and we must instead step aside, hand them over to Jesus and let Him alone judge them in that sense, as to what punishment, if any, they deserve. That said, we are equally forbidden to pronounce on what rewards, crowns etc a fellow Christian should or should not receive at the Bema Judgment, i.e. the Judgment Seat of Christ.

But we are *commanded* to judge everybody in the sense of *diakrino* so we can live safely, protect our families and churches and avoid being deceived, abused and exploited. Therefore, we can judge people, sermons, books, ideas and churches every day in the sense of diakrino and we commit no sin.

But if we judge anyone in the sense of *kreetace* then we do commit a sin, indeed a very serious one, of usurping Jesus’ role. Therefore, our forgiving of the unsaved is essentially about *not judging them* in that improper unauthorised way. We are to step aside, hand them over to Jesus and leave it all to Him to deal with.

That is why I say the bar is set much lower when we are forgiving unsaved unbelievers, because if they were genuine Christians we would need to do far more than just step aside and leave it to Jesus to judge and punish them. We would need to join with Him in writing off their debt to us and cancelling any wrongs they have done to us and washing them away. We are to see genuine Christians as He does and to recognise that He has washed their sins away completely.

For a *genuine believer* who has wronged us we are required to do something very hard, which is to treat the wrong they did as having been washed away by Jesus and to try to see them as He sees them. Clearly, forgiveness is a much harder task when the wrongdoer is a genuine Christian, and we will usually need God’s help to do it properly.

Having said all that, it is unavoidable that we must exercise a diakrino type judgement in relation to any wrongdoer to begin with, even if he is saved, to determine whether, in our assessment, he is a real Christian or not. The answer to that primary question then determines whether we have to forgive him as a fellow believer which involves totally “writing off his debt” or to deal with him as an unsaved unbeliever which only requires us to step aside and leave him to be judged by Jesus.

The different standard that applies when forgiving unbelievers

But let’s focus now on the much larger group, the one which causes us far more problems in terms of needing to forgive their sins against us. I refer to unsaved unbelievers, i.e. complete heathens, but also phoney, unrepentant, false ‘Christians’ who are not actually Christians at all but just unsaved churchgoers.

Therefore, to become crystal clear as to what our duties are in terms of forgiving *unsaved* people, and given that so much depends on getting this right, we need to nail this down and get some precise definitions. To begin this process we must ask:

- a) what exactly is the definition of ‘forgiveness’ in the context of the unsaved?
- b) what exactly do we have to do to forgive an unsaved person properly?

These two questions are crucially important because, in my experience, the vast majority of people don't know what forgiveness is or how to do it in any of its forms or aspects. It is one of those words which it is assumed everyone understands but, in fact, they usually don't. Most people, including churchgoers, and even leaders, think forgiveness means some or all of the following:

- a) telling yourself the person didn't really wrong you
- b) telling yourself the person wasn't really to blame
- c) being willing to become friends with that person
- d) being willing to trust that person again
- e) being willing to renew a relationship with them
- f) no longer feeling hurt by the wrong they did to you
- g) forgetting all about the wrong they did to you

In fact, forgiveness does not necessarily involve *any* of those things when the wrongdoer is an unbeliever. Indeed, it generally won't. That is why people find forgiveness so hard. It is usually because they have a profoundly wrong definition of forgiveness and are therefore trying to do the wrong things in the wrong way and for the wrong reasons.

Then, when they find they can't do it, they tell themselves "*I can't forgive that person. It's too hard*". That is why we need to find the correct, biblical definition of forgiveness at least in the context of a *sin or crime* committed against us by an *unsaved unbeliever*. Many years ago I asked God to help me to define and explain forgiveness of this type so as to help people to achieve it and I believe He gave me a clear answer by way of an analogy.

In my Book 2 on "*Growing in the Character of a Disciple*" I devote three detailed chapters to discussing the issue of forgiving others, although that book looks at it almost entirely in terms of forgiving the unsaved. I strongly recommend that you refer to those chapters in Book 2 because I can't repeat it all here.

Essentially, the analogy God put into my mind was from a legal context. It was to think of how a judge "*recuses himself*" if he believes, for whatever reason, that he is not the right person to conduct a trial. It could be because one of the parties or witnesses is a friend of his, or a relative, or an enemy, or a neighbour, or a former business associate etc.

There are many reasons which would cause an honest judge to say "*I am not the right judge to conduct this trial. The case needs to be transferred onto the list of some other judge*". Therefore, when we forgive an *unbeliever* we are basically doing the same by '*recusing ourselves*' and asking the 'court clerk' to transfer that person's case onto the list of Judge Jesus.

We then step away from the case, play no further part in it, stop resenting or hating the wrongdoer, stop seeking personal vengeance, stop thinking about him at all if we can, and leave the whole thing for Jesus to deal with - which He will. When you view forgiving the unsaved in these much narrower terms you suddenly see how easy it is to do and that anyone can do it.

It is not impossible, or even difficult. You just hand the unsaved person over to Jesus to judge them instead of you doing it and you then walk away, free of any responsibility for dealing with them. It is completely liberating. And yet, as you can see, it doesn't require you to trust the person again, or go

on holiday with them, or lend them your lawnmower, or regard them as if they were not a wrongdoer and as if they had not wronged you.

No pretence is involved at all. It is a purely legal matter. The key point to grasp is that *forgiveness of the unsaved is a decision, not a feeling*. That is why anybody can do it, because we can all force ourselves to make a *decision* but we can't make ourselves *feel* something which we don't really feel and have no reason to feel.

So, if necessary, it is perfectly alright for you to have no further dealings with the unsaved wrongdoer and to continue to view him as untrustworthy. At any rate, nothing in that is inconsistent with having truly forgiven him, so long as the job of judging him and even punishing him, has been genuinely transferred to Jesus and you are no longer seeking to deal with it yourself.

Some passages which deal with our duty to forgive, or rather not to judge (kreetace) unsaved unbelievers who are not part of the Church

If you reflect on each of the examples I give below of passages which deal with forgiving or not judging unbelievers, you will see that in every case it is clear that they have not been forgiven and that Jesus is still fully intending to judge them. Therefore, unlike when we are dealing with fellow Christians, these are wrongdoers whom God has *not forgiven* and whom He *will punish*. This verse from Romans makes that very clear:

¹⁹ *Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written: "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.*

Romans 12:19 (NASB)

Likewise, this verse from 2 Thessalonians:

⁶ *since indeed God deems it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you,*
2 Thessalonians 1:6 (RSV)

This passage from Psalm 58 concerning the wicked is even clearer and is plainly not referring to people whom God has forgiven:

¹⁰ *The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance;*
he will bathe his feet in the blood of the wicked.
¹¹ *Men will say, "Surely there is a reward for the righteous;*
surely there is a God who judges on earth."

Psalm 58:10-11 (RSV)

This verse from Proverbs also suggests that although we are not to seek to "repay evil", i.e. to take vengeance, God will do so on our behalf. At any rate, it says God will deliver us, meaning to rescue us from these wrongdoers and the implication is that he will also punish them. In any case, even if you feel unable to draw that inference from this verse, it is explicitly stated in many other passages:

²² *Do not say, "I will repay evil";*
wait for the Lord, and he will deliver you.
Proverbs 20:22 (ESV)

So, for us to try to judge unsaved people is not only inappropriate and presumptuous but also premature. God does not want them to be judged until the proper time, at which point Jesus Himself will do it:

⁵ Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of human hearts; and then praise will come to each person from God.

1 Corinthians 4:5 (NASB)

The question arises as to what will God do to us if we don't forgive an *unbeliever* as opposed to a *saved fellow Christian*? We saw from the lengthy passage Matthew 18:23-35 that if we won't forgive a saved fellow member of the Church then God sends a "torturer" and hands us over to that torturer, i.e. a demon.

I believe He does so in the case of fellow Christians because of our hypocrisy and ingratitude in that we had been forgiven much more by Him but now we refuse to forgive the much smaller wrong done to us by a fellow Christian whom God has already forgiven. The penalty for that is the "torturer" which is a demon who will be given liberty to attack us and harass us to a greater level than is usual.

However, if the wrongdoer we refuse to forgive is an unbeliever, we are not dealing with someone whom God has forgiven because we have seen from all the above verses and many more that he still faces God's judgment. So the offence here in not forgiving the unsaved is not hypocrisy, because this wrongdoer is not in the same position as we are. God has not forgiven him.

I believe the offence we commit here, in not forgiving this unsaved person, is not hypocrisy or ingratitude but rather that we are *usurping Jesus' role* as Judge of the world. Plainly, that is a very serious sin on our part, but what will God do to us for that failure to forgive? No specific mention is made of His response.

I think the "torturers" sent out as per Matthew 18:23-35 in the case of not forgiving a fellow Christian would not seem to apply when we fail to forgive the unsaved, as the wrongdoer is not saved. Nevertheless, although the penalty is not defined, some kind of robust response from God can still be expected due to not only our refusal to forgive, but also to the sin of usurping Jesus' role. That is no small matter and we can hardly expect it to be treated lightly.

Imagine that you had wandered in to your local court, gone to the robing room, put on a judge's robes and then walked into open Court and sat down on the Judge's bench. You would immediately be dragged away by a court usher and security staff and the police would be called. They would not treat it as a minor matter. I expect an even more robust response can be expected for such impertinence and presumption when it comes to usurping the role of Judge Jesus.

As I said, I don't have room here to go into all the detail that I went into in my Book 2 so please refer to that for a fuller explanation of forgiving others and for additional examples and advice. Please encourage the person to whom you are ministering to do so as well. The better they understand the real meaning of forgiveness, for both the saved and unsaved, and the less confused they are about it, the better they will be able to do it.

That is vitally important because there is reason to believe that the demons won't go until those wrongdoers have been truly and meaningfully forgiven. Therefore, don't just tell the person to "forgive

others”, as if the meaning of that was simple and obvious. Explain to them exactly what it really means and what it really involves, and also what it *doesn't involve*, so they can properly grasp what is needed.

And be fully prepared to explain it two or three or even ten times! Otherwise, they will inevitably misunderstand the task and will be unable or unwilling to do it – because their definition of forgiveness is wrong, especially in relation to the unsaved. Yet it is so deeply engrained in their minds it is hard to replace it with the correct definition.

But when you have eventually got the point across to them, and you are sure they really grasp it, then ask them if there are any people they resent, or feel angry or bitter towards, or who have wronged them. Sometimes it can be in terrible ways, such as child abuse, sexual offences, violence, abandonment or betrayal etc.

But it is also possible for the wrong that was done to be more mundane and ordinary, such that it would not make headline news. Yet it has occurred often, or over a prolonged period, and thus it feels very major *to them*, even if others wouldn't see it as such.

It could be that for any number of reasons it has acquired a high level of significance in the person's mind such that the level of anger and bitterness they feel is high even if the wrongs in themselves were not spectacular by any objective measurement.

So, you are not only looking for wrongs which are inherently severe, on an objective basis, but also for lesser wrongs of a more mundane type which, for whatever reason, have become significant and are “eating away” at the person and causing them to feel a lot of bitterness.

One of the hardest things to forgive is where the wrong is *continuing* and is therefore a present ongoing matter rather than historic. That makes things far more difficult because the pain keeps being renewed and becomes brand new every time it occurs. Nevertheless, it can still be forgiven, provided we define forgiveness correctly, in terms of recusing yourself and stepping aside.

Then ask them to make a list of all those people and what exactly they did, whether it is in the past or ongoing. Then help the person to truly forgive each of those people, *as per the definitions given above*, not by their own garbled definitions.

If any of those wrongdoers are genuinely saved Christians (which is unlikely) then put their names on a separate list and remind the person that those people need to be forgiven to a higher standard, by a different definition, and that the wrong done must be “written off”, not merely handed over to Jesus for Him to judge.

Be sure to get the person to include on the list all the wrongs and wrongdoers which are *significant to them*, and which make them feel angry, resentful and bitter, not just the ones which seem serious to you. If you handle this properly and get the person to truly forgive, there can be a real breakthrough. They can then offload the heavy burden of anger and unforgiveness they had been carrying, like a person taking off a heavy backpack.

That will not only help them to achieve deliverance, but also set them free from the poison of bitterness, rage and hatred which can destroy the life of a person who won't forgive. That is how unfair it is. Not only were they wronged in the first place, but their refusal to forgive is now eating away at them like a cancer as well. Indeed, it can often lead to literal physical cancer. A Christian oncologist told me that.

Let me tell you the story of Bernie, the father of a close friend of mine. I heard he was very ill and was dying and I felt a strong conviction that Bernie was not genuinely saved, even though he was a 'churchgoer'. I had various reasons for thinking that, but the most relevant one, in this context, is that he had a major problem with unforgiveness. In his case, I think all or virtually all of the people he had not forgiven were unsaved, not Christians.

It was so bad that he literally had a notebook in which he had written the names of *everyone who had ever wronged him*, and the details of what they had done. And, far from forgiving them, he took a grim pleasure in keeping that list and holding on to his bitterness and 'nursing' it. I felt convicted to go and see Bernie so I took a day off work and drove over 100 miles to visit him in his home.

I felt it was urgent, as he was about to die, unsaved in my opinion, with his unforgiveness towards others as the key problem preventing him being saved. So, I went to see Bernie and I told him as gently as I could that I felt he was not saved and that his little notebook of people who had wronged him was the key obstacle to him being 'converted' and becoming a genuine Christian, as opposed to a mere 'churchgoer'.

Bernie was shocked at this and at first he would not accept what I said. So, he asked his son, my friend, what he thought about it and he confirmed what I said. But still Bernie wouldn't accept it. Neither would he burn the little book of wrongdoers as I had advised him to do. But God was clearly actively engaged on Bernie's case and backed up my message Himself by sending Bernie a carer paid for by the Health Service who visited him at his home.

This lady was a Christian (what are the chances of that?) and she got to know Bernie and he told her what I had said about him being unsaved and about his little book of names. And she too affirmed what I had said and urged Bernie to burn it. But he still refused, which is itself a sign of the terribly strong hold that unforgiveness can have over a person.

Sadly, this Christian nurse was then transferred elsewhere and was no longer looking after Bernie. But guess what God did next. He actually sent *another Christian nurse to take over Bernie's care*. He then went through it all again with her, telling her what I had said about him not being saved and showing her the little book of names. She too then confirmed what I'd said and urged Bernie to burn it and, at long last, he did so – and achieved a great release resulting in his salvation.

I like to tell that story because it not only confirms the importance of forgiving others but also displays God's amazing kindness and care towards one individual soul who needed to be set free. Look at the lengths God went to in order to help Bernie to be released from his prison of unforgiveness and bitterness.

Therefore, with the person you are helping, go through each of the names on their list and lead them firstly in a prayer of *supplication* about that situation asking God to take it over and deal with it so they no longer need to. But then also, after making that prayer, get them to make *a declaration or proclamation, out loud*, whereby they announce that they have forgiven that person.

By doing so they announce to God, to you, to themselves and to the whole spiritual realm in the heavenly places, with all the angels and demons listening, that they have forgiven that unsaved person, handed them over to be 'judged' by Jesus, and are now recusing themselves and stepping aside so as to play no further part in it.

Dealing with the first step, whereby they ask for God's help and intervention, their prayer of *supplication* might be something like this. Remember that they are now in supplicatory prayer mode, speaking to God, not the heavenly places, and making a respectful request to Him:

“LORD, I have felt wronged by person A and have been feeling bitter and angry and have been usurping your role as the Judge of all mankind and have acted as if it was my place to judge and punish person A. Please forgive me for that and help me now to hand their case over to you, and to ‘transfer it to your list’ so that you deal with person A and I can walk away and play no further part in being his judge. Help me LORD to do this, and to persist in it, and please take away from me all the rage, bitterness and hatred that I have felt which has been eating at me like acid and which demons have been able to exploit to gain access into my life. Please close all those doors and windows that were opened by my unforgiveness and help me to maintain my forgiveness of person A”.

Having made that prayer of *supplication* whereby they not only confess the sin of unforgiveness but also ask for God's help to forgive, you could then lead them in a *proclamation* along the lines set out below whereby *they themselves announce their forgiveness of person A*, so they are now changing to a very different mode of speech as they are addressing the heavenly places.

They should do it as if they were a town crier making an announcement in the market place or an MP making a speech in the House of Commons. Then God and you and the whole spiritual realm, can hear it and take note.

By the way, for the avoidance of doubt, this forgiveness *does not need to be communicated to the wrongdoer*. It could be, sometimes, for example in circumstances where it is hoped that the relationship can be resumed, and where it would not be inappropriate for any other reason. But that is not what will be done in most cases.

Usually it is best if it is said in private and the only witnesses are you, God and the entire spiritual realm in the heavenly places – including of course the very demon(s) that you will shortly seek to cast out. Although the person you are helping must never speak *to the demon*, there is no harm in those demons *overhearing* the proclamation of forgiveness which the person is making.

If nothing else, the demon then knows that his ‘tenancy agreement’ has just been revoked. So, get the person to say something like this as an announcement or proclamation to the heavenly places:

“I acknowledge that I have, up to now, harboured feelings of unforgiveness towards person A for the way he wronged me when he did XYZ. But that ends right here and now because I hereby announce that I forgive person A and release him from my life and from my ‘case list’ so that he will, from now on, be on Jesus’ list and be judged only by Him, not by me”.

You might be wondering where the person goes from there and whether or not they are also under any duty to do any of the following:

- a) wish the wrongdoer well
- b) ask Jesus to forgive him as well as forgiving him themselves
- c) ask Jesus to also refrain from punishing him
- d) pray for his salvation so he will never face God's wrath for what he did

Strictly speaking, none of the things listed at (a)–(d) above are needed when the wrongdoer is an unsaved unbeliever who is not part of the Church. In their case, there is *no duty to think or pray in those ways*. At any rate, those things are not part of the definition of forgiveness at its most basic level when applied to unbelievers and are not needed in order for you, or the person you are helping, to be able to say that person A has been genuinely forgiven.

Therefore, person A can be truly forgiven and the doors and windows closed so the demons' right of entry is taken away, without doing any of those things. That is why I say that in this context of the unsaved, forgiving is easy, because it is a *decision, not a feeling*, and because it has only a limited and very specific definition. It only requires you to 'recuse' yourself and step aside, without any further duties being created.

Therefore, you or the person you are helping could still report person A to the police to be prosecuted. You could also feel free to operate as a witness and give evidence against him, even though you have forgiven person A. The point is that in such a situation it would be the police or the lawyers who would be prosecuting person A, not you. Therefore, his case would be on their minds, occupying their thoughts and their feelings, not yours.

Having said all that, and provided you or the person you are helping want to do so, and feel able to do so, it is also perfectly possible to go further and to operate as per (a)–(d) above even though the wrongdoer is an unsaved unbeliever. That could then mean praying for person A, wishing him well, seeking his salvation and even asking Jesus not to punish him.

That is in many ways desirable, and will do you good, and help to heal your emotions and your spirit from the wrongs done to you. It is just that such things are not, strictly speaking, part of the definition of forgiving others at its most basic level, i.e. concerning the unsaved.

For example, in my own case which I spoke of earlier, where two former business partners wrongfully expelled me for exposing one of them in a theft and where they then stole my £250,000 capital in the firm, which would be worth a lot more than that now in real terms, I felt able to go beyond the bare definition of forgiving an unbeliever.

So, I did recuse myself, and I handed them over to Jesus to judge them. But I also went further and asked Him not to punish them eternally on my account and to allow them to be saved and thus to escape His eternal wrath. I was mindful of these verses:

**¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.
Romans 12:14 (NASB)**

**¹⁶ At my first defense no one took my part; all deserted me. May it not be charged against them!
2 Timothy 4:16 (RSV)**

That said, I did ask God to expose their crimes, and to vindicate me, but to do so *only in this life, not in eternity*, and I truly prayed for them to be saved and become Christians. And I believe God answered my prayer, at least the first part. That is because 13 years later I sold what had by then become a valuable law firm and retired, never to work again, and to be a full time Bible teacher.

However, the two of them met God's temporal judgment (i.e. in this life) because their law firm from which I had been expelled collapsed such that they lost everything, including what they had stolen from

me. They also went into bankruptcy which was a serious problem at their age, as they were both a lot older than me and thus had no time to start all over again.

So, although God enabled me to go further than the basic definition of forgiveness for unbelievers, *that is not always required for everyone*. Therefore, you need not, and must not, put anyone under any pressure to go further or to do more than to simply recuse themselves, step aside, and transfer the case onto the ‘list’ of Judge Jesus. That alone will suffice to enable them to be set free and to enable you to cast out the demon(s) who came in via that route. But, above all, it is realistically achievable and the person will be capable of doing it.

But what if the person is a fellow Christian, or claims to be, and has not necessarily sinned against us but owes us money?

Let’s now move to a much narrower context which precisely matches the parable Jesus told at Matthew 18:23-25 and also let’s take it at a literal level, not metaphorically. What if the person we won’t forgive is literally

- a) a member of our church
- b) and owes us money?

What should we do then? They haven’t necessarily sinned against us or committed any crime, although they might have done if, for example they lied to us or borrowed the money with no intention of ever repaying it. But what if it is just a simple unpaid debt? Let’s consider this troubling passage from 1 Corinthians:

¹When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? ² Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? ³ Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! ⁴ So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? ⁵ I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, ⁶ but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers? ⁷ To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?

1 Corinthians 6:1-7 (ESV)

In 1 Corinthians 6:1-7 Paul advocates taking disputes to the *local church* rather than going to Court. He speaks of getting a wise man in the church to settle the dispute like an arbitrator. And Jesus speaks of a similar procedure for dispute resolution *within churches* in the famous passage from Matthew 18:15-17 which I refer to as the “Matthew 18 procedure”:

¹⁵ “Now if your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that on the testimony of two or three witnesses every matter may be confirmed. ¹⁷ And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, he is to be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Matthew 18:15-17 (NASB)

At first sight you might therefore conclude that every Christian who has any kind of financial dispute with a fellow member of a church should not go to see lawyers or the police but should take it to the local church to rule upon the dispute and decide between the parties. However, everything that Jesus and Paul said here was clearly based on the assumption that you and the other person:

- a) are both saved believers, i.e. genuine Christians
- b) you both belong to a local church which operates on biblical principles and has a biblical structure, i.e. meeting in a home with unpaid local elders in leadership, not in a big building with 500 members
- c) and that local church (a house church) is willing to administer the Matthew 18 procedure.

However, what are we to do if instead:

- a) the other party is not a genuine Christian but is just a nominal ‘churchgoer’ who is not saved and doesn’t believe the Bible
- b) our local church is not organised or structured on biblical home church lines but is instead a large, traditional, hierarchical, clergy led church based on the Roman Catholic model, as partially amended by the Reformation
- c) is not willing or equipped to administer the Matthew 18:15-17 procedure and would consider you crazy if you asked it to. Indeed, have you ever actually seen anybody resolve any dispute via your church? And can you even imagine what would be said to them if they asked it to do so?

The practical problem we face is that the whole Matthew 18:15-17 procedure pre-supposes a small group of seriously committed disciples meeting in a home, perhaps 10-30 of them, led by 2-3 elders such that everyone knows everyone and a dispute can easily be addressed, resolved and ruled upon by that whole group if need be.

But if you are part of a big traditional, hierarchical church led by a ‘clergyman’ with 100-500 members, or even 1,000 or more, how could that large group address a private dispute between A and B? It would be completely impractical and even unthinkable, which of course is why it never happens.

Being practical therefore, what can we do and what should we do if the Matthew 18:15-17 procedure is simply not on offer and nobody is willing to operate it? I remember a case that arose in a church I was part of in the 1990s and it had about 300 members. The Matthew 18:15-17 procedure had never been practised ever and was therefore effectively out of the question.

One day a generous but naïve Christian called Steve came to see me to say he had loaned money to a young woman to help pay for her wedding. She was not part of our church but attended another church. But now she was refusing to repay him and was even brass faced enough to point to 1 Corinthians 6:1-7 and tell him that the Bible forbids him to sue her!

She really said that and she fully intended to rely on his sincere observance of that passage as a basis for her being confident that she needn’t repay him. It wasn’t that she was unable to repay him. She just didn’t want to and she thought the passage from 1 Corinthians gave her a ‘get out’. Her brazen attitude astonished me. Indeed, I concluded from this that she was probably not a genuine Christian at all, but just a churchgoer.

However, I advised Steve to leave it to me. I then wrote to the brass faced young woman putting her right about how to interpret 1 Corinthians 6:1-7 and telling her I personally would sue her on Steve's behalf if she didn't repay him. And I said I would do it free of charge. I told her Steve might not feel comfortable about taking her to court himself but I felt very comfortable about it.

And it worked. She repaid him immediately, within 24 hours, despite having refused to do so the day before. That just illustrates what I mean when I say there are a lot of people in churches today, even the better churches, who are phoney and probably unsaved.