

# How And When To Forgive

*"If your brother or sister sins against you,  
rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them."*

*Luke 17:3 (NIV)*

*"Forgive as the Lord forgave you."*

*Colossians 3:13 (NIV)*

*"If we confess our sins,  
he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins  
and purify us from all unrighteousness."*

*1 John 1:9 (NIV)*

I recall a saying of my parents that often followed when I broke a house rule. For example, in winter if I came into the house without first taking my snowy boots off, I would hear the words, "Gordon, if I have told you once I have told you a thousand times, take your boots off at the door and don't track snow through the house."

It seems to be the case that children need to hear the same house rule many times before they learn what is acceptable and what is not. I have also learned over many years that adults sometimes need to hear the same truth numerous times before the reality actually becomes part of their conscious thoughts.

Several times over many years I have written a devotional on the matter of how and when to forgive. I repeat this teaching here to refresh your thinking on this vital

matter of forgiving people who offend us.

It is clear from our verses today that we are to follow the example of our Father in heaven regarding the matter of how and when to forgive people who offend us. Our sins are forgiven by the Lord after we confess them not before we confess them.

Before we confess our sin, the Holy Spirit convinces us of our sin and leads us to repent (John 16:8). In 1 John 1:9 we learn the amazing truth concerning the character of true forgiveness. It is permanent and total. Once the Lord forgives our sins He no longer "remembers" them. (Isaiah 43:25 (NIV))

So, when do we forgive someone who offends us? The answer is after they repent and not before. This is the way of the Lord. What do we do after a person sins against us? We do what the

Lord does, we rebuke the offender. Again, this is how the Lord forgives. He first rebukes and then waits for the offender to repent. Once the offender repents the sin is forgiven and forgotten.

Are you willing and ready to forgive the offending person when they repent? Will you put the matter behind you as the Lord puts your sins behind Him when you confess them? Will you willingly embrace and renew fellowship with the forgiven person? These are tough questions but important ones to keep in mind as we all seek to imitate our Father in heaven. May you have grace today as you ponder the issue of how and when to forgive according to the Lord's method.

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