

DA36. Forgiving Those Who Sin Against Us.

We are to personally forgive all who sin against us, and judicially forgive brothers who sin against us and repent.

This precept is derived from His Word (blessed is He):

Key New Testament Scriptures

Matthew 6: 14-15

For if you forgive others their offenses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others their offenses, your heavenly Father will not forgive yours.

Matthew 18:21-22

Then Kefa came up and said to him, "Rabbi, how often can my brother sin against me and I have to forgive him? As many as seven times?" "No, not seven times," answered Yeshua, "but seventy times seven!"

Mark 11:25¹

And when you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive your offenses.

Luke 6:37

Don't judge, and you won't be judged. Don't condemn, and you won't be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

Luke 17:3-4

Watch yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. Also, if seven times in one day he sins against you, and seven times he comes to you and says, 'I repent,' you are to forgive him.

Ephesians 4:31-32

Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, violent assertiveness and slander, along with all spitefulness. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted; and forgive each other, just as in the Messiah God has also forgiven you.

Colossians 3:13

Bear with one another; if anyone has a complaint against someone else, forgive him. Indeed, just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must forgive.

Additional New Testament Scriptures

Matthew 18:32-35

¹ In other translations, verses 25-26.

Luke 6:27-32, 11:1-4, 23:34

John 20:23

1 Corinthians 5:12-13

2 Corinthians 2:10

Ephesians 4:32

Related New Testament Mitzvot

None

Supportive Tanakh Scriptures

Genesis 50:16-21

So they [Yosef's brothers] sent a message to Yosef which said, "Your father gave this order before he died: 'Say to Yosef, "I beg you now, please forgive your brothers' crime and wickedness in doing you harm."' So now, we beg of you, forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father." Yosef wept when they spoke to him; and his brothers too came, prostrated themselves before him and said, "Here, we are your slaves." But Yosef said to them, "Don't be afraid! Am I in the place of God? You meant to do me harm, but God meant it for good- so that it would come about as it is today, with many people's lives being saved. So don't be afraid- I will provide for you and your little ones." In this way he comforted them, speaking kindly to them.

Leviticus 19:17

Do not hate your brother in your heart, but rebuke your neighbor frankly, so that you won't carry sin because of him. Don't take vengeance on or bear a grudge against any of your people; rather, love your neighbor as yourself; I am ADONAI.

Leviticus 19:22

The cohen will make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering before ADONAI for the sin he committed, and he will be forgiven for the sin he committed.

Proverbs 19:11

People with good sense are slow to anger, and it is their glory to overlook an offense.

Ecclesiastes 7:21-22

Also, don't take seriously every word spoken, such as when you hear your servant speaking badly of you; because often, as you yourself know, you have spoken badly of others.

Comment

FORGIVENESS IN JEWISH TRADITION

While there is no explicit commandment in the *Torah* requiring that we forgive our brother, there is one Scripture, Leviticus 19:17, that implicitly means the same thing:

"Do not hate your brother in your heart, but rebuke your neighbor frankly, so that you won't carry sin because of him. Don't take vengeance on or bear a grudge against any of your people; rather, love your neighbor as yourself; I am ADONAI."

Rabbinical literature endorses the principle of forgiving others and gives Genesis 50:16-21 (Yosef's forgiveness of his brothers) as the example we are to follow. Beyond that, all other references to forgiveness are rabbinic; they include:

Mishnah: Yoma 8:9; Baba Kama (92a) 8:5

Talmud: Yoma 86b; Rosh HaShana 17a; Ta'anith 20a, b; Beitz 32b; Shabbat 151b

Shulchan Aruch: Yom Kippur 606:1

Mishneh Torah: De'ot 6:6, 9; Madda 6:6, 9; Teshuvah 2:9, 10, 11; 4:3

PERSONAL FORGIVENESS²

It is clear, however, from the New Covenant Scriptures, that there are not one, but two kinds of forgiveness – personal (which is unconditional) and judicial (which is conditional) – and our responsibility to forgive others is different for each of them.

I call the kind of forgiveness commanded in Mark 11:25³ "personal forgiveness:"

"And when you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive your offenses."

Notice that this kind of forgiveness is truly without condition, and is to be granted, not only to brothers in the Lord, but to anyone who has sinned against us. It does not seek to judge the offender, nor does it require that the offender be repentant. It must be given as soon as possible after the offense is committed so that bitterness does not take root within us and do spiritual damage. This kind of forgiveness is essentially a releasing of the matter to God and does not retain anger or a desire for personal vengeance (see Ephesians 4:31-32). Personal forgiveness is a manifestation of godly love that we are to give, even to our enemies (Luke 6:27-32). Yeshua illustrated this kind of forgiveness when, in Luke 23:34a, he besought his Father in heaven to forgive his Roman soldier executioners who were, even at that moment, subjecting him to an unjust and painful death.

Our granting personal forgiveness and not harboring bitterness against those who have sinned against us purges us of unholy attitudes that may have resulted from our being victimized, and opens the way for God to forgive us for our sins as well. Conversely, if we do not grant personal forgiveness, Mark 11:25,⁴ Matthew 6: 14-15, and Luke 6:37 convey the certainty that God will not forgive us either. Granting personal forgiveness does not, however, mean that the relationship or trust between persons is restored. It only means that the person who has forgiven has freed himself from anger and a desire for vengeance, and that he has a heart to see the person who has sinned against him repent so that he might be blessed by God.

² Sometimes termed "unconditional forgiveness."

³ In other translations, verses 25-26.

⁴ *ibid*.

JUDICIAL FORGIVENESS

I call the kind of forgiveness commanded in Luke 17:3-4 "judicial forgiveness."⁵

“Watch yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. Also, if seven times in one day he sins against you, and seven times he comes to you and says, 'I repent,' you are to forgive him.”

Judicial forgiveness is different from personal forgiveness in several ways that the Luke Scripture illustrates. First, judicial forgiveness applies only to brother believers.⁶ Second, whereas personal forgiveness must be given whether or not there is repentance, judicial forgiveness is only granted if the offending brother repents. The brother who has been sinned against is required to judge whether the offending brother has repented before the offended brother forgives him. It is different in another way as well, as illustrated in John 20: 23, which states:

“If you forgive someone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you hold them, they are held.”

Here you see that if the one who is sinned-against judges that his offending brother is repentant and forgives him, God also forgives the offending brother. Conversely, if the one who is sinned against withholds forgiveness because, in his judgment, his offending brother is not repentant, then God honors the judgment and does not forgive the offending brother either. One may ask why John 20:23 applies only as between believers since the Scripture doesn't say that! It is because the verse involves judging, and 1 Corinthians 5:12-13 allows us to judge those who are believers, but not those who are not.

FORGIVENESS HAS NO LIMITS

There is no maximum number of times that we must forgive those who sin against us, even if they do so repeatedly. As previously stated in Luke 17:4:

“Also, if seven times in one day he sins against you, and seven times he comes to you and says, 'I repent,' you are to forgive him.”

And similarly, in Matthew 18:21-22:

“Then Kefa came up and said to him, ‘Rabbi, how often can my brother sin against me and I have to forgive him? As many as seven times?’ ‘No, not seven times,” answered Yeshua, ‘but seventy times seven!’”

⁵ Sometimes referred to as “conditional” or “transactional” forgiveness.

⁶ Understand that everything said about a brother believer applies to a sister as well.

CAVEAT

Scripture's requirement that we forgive does not negate our responsibility to cooperate with public authorities when matters of justice or the protection of others is involved.

Related Mitzvot in Volumes 1 & 2

N04 Forgiving Our Neighbor