



# TABLETALK

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by John C. Moore

## Forgiveness

*The How, The Now, The Wow*

Struggling with forgiveness is one of the dirty, little, secret, seldom-discussed subjects in the church. The evil sequel — discouragement, bitterness, anger, hatred, lack of kindness, revenge — all peek out above the waves as the tip of our behavior iceberg, hinting at more dangerous and ominous realities below the surface of our public image. In the work world, no major models suggest that successful career advancement comes by following the gentle or compassionate spirit. In the home, forgiveness seemingly means losing control or being vulnerable, again.

Every human experience can identify with these struggles. In my life, I have been estranged for years from my birth father. With five adult children and their spouses, working toward healthy and honest relationships is ongoing. Mix in the subject of divorce, and my relationship plate is usually pretty full.

In my work as an attorney, we specialize in focusing on gaining or protecting the rights of our clients. In the Bible, it is the mirror opposite in most cases. How does forgiveness factor into my daily life? **It seems that forgiveness is always difficult: when it stops being difficult, it stops being forgiveness!**

### The Test

The apostle Peter, in the context of others who sin against us, asks: 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?' (Matt 18:21f). Jesus, in opposition to Lamech's defiant taunt to God's grace to Cain, responds: 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy — seven times.' In other words, rather than measuring our 'forgiveness meter' by the law, or one beyond the law, Jesus tells Peter, if you are counting, you are not forgiving! The core motivation of forgiveness is not me, not how good I am, but God, and what we have received from God.

### Failing the Test

Illustrating this truth, Jesus gives us the parable of the unmerciful servant. (Matt 18:23-35). This servant, while suffering the impossibility of a debt to his master too large to ever be repaid — but benefitting by the forgiveness from the master — resulting in the cancellation of the debt, and being released (suggesting suffering some kind of debtor incarceration until his

debt was forgiven — see below). This act of mercy saved this servant, his wife, his children, his possessions — his whole world was tipped back upright. Even so, when this same servant was owed a much lesser amount from a co-worker, this same man assaulted his fellow debtor servant, tossing him in the self same prison he had just escaped. To us, this hypocrisy is apparent, offensive. But more so, Jesus warns that this servant was jailed again with the prospect of torture, until he paid back (apparently new) debt to the master.

This is scary stuff. If your understanding of the Bible is like mine, this parable to the disciples is not meant to warn of eternal punishment of believers once redeemed. It is a warning to disciples. It warns that the issue of forgiveness, and how we handle the affairs and relationships around us, becomes a baseline for either spiritual growth or judgment, for believers.

### Passing the Test

Staying in this same context, Jesus next teaches about marriage and divorce — that human experience that most intimately reflects genuine characteristics of forgiveness — or not. As an attorney who also works in this area, I am always challenged by the thousands of hearings and trials conducted for clients, and the human and family fractures that accompany every divorce. While the realities are that divorce was allowed in the Old Testament (Deut 24), and even now divorce is inevitable because of a variety of factors in a marriage or family, it is never easy, never uneventful, and always a departure from the preferred option.

To that end, Jesus warns about the narrow exception to the rule of marriage, and the created design and model as sons of Adam and daughters of Eve, that is to be pursued (Matt 19). The disciples response was the illogical extreme — 'it is better not to marry' — and Jesus even addresses this foolish diversion by acknowledging the second narrow exception to the rule of marriage — staying single for kingdom purposes. Again, forgiveness becomes the glue that holds together healthy marital relationships, following our created design.

### Conclusion

Forgiveness starts with God's relationship with us, and finishes with our relationship back to Him. Human relationships are safely nurtured and cultivated in the middle ground of this experience. The apostle John weighs in.

**First, From Heaven to Earth.** Within the image of legal vindication in the courtrooms of heaven, and the absolute promise that believes luxuriate

under the 'atoning sacrifice' verdict before God in Christ, John reminds us that forgiveness begins with the benefits of atoning grace to us, and the responding obligation of believers to confess or acknowledge our sins before God, keeping barriers to relationship and growth removed between God and us as His children (1 John 1:9-2:2). In other words, the first and regular concern for the sincere saint is a vertical honesty and acknowledgment of sin between the believer and his God. There is no reason to skirt this fact. Sin is and will always be a regular struggle for believers. The bad news: the flesh and the spirit war against each other. The better news: we don't have to stay in that slough of despond. We have the ability to live above and beyond the draw from our fallen nature. As a new creation in Christ, we have the capacity to act differently — to act more like Him who is our Savior.

**Then, From Earth to Heaven.** Our third apostle, Paul, reminds us: 'Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.' (Eph 4:32). Just as the ability to forgive comes first from God, that selfsame resource is our motive and model for conduct with others, resulting in honor and worship back to God.

Here is the hard reality. Simply put, the Bible does not provide excuses or options for holding back forgiveness. My clients have been victimized by all kinds of harmful experiences — physical abuse, debilitating physical injuries, childhood assaults or family fractures, parental failures, life long histories of failures or rejections. But as hard as those experiences were or are, and as much as these experiences reach into our present lives, none of them provide excuses or exemptions from the duty of the believer — to live like Jesus, with the enablement of God — because, in sum, we who are forgiven must give to others what we have received from God. Nothing less is acceptable. Ask God to help you in these things. He wants you to succeed in these areas even more than we want or need growth as pilgrims on the way.

This commitment becomes a relational tonic — a medicinal balm — that counters rage, anger, bitterness, slander and revenge — with a life characterized by compassion, mercy, speaking the truth in love, kindness, and forgiveness. My commitment is to work on these things progressively in my life. Join me. It isn't easy, but it is real. Remembering both my own waywardness and God's treatment of His other wayward creatures should encourage me to be gracious, forbearing, and forgiving. Your rewards will be both earthly and heavenly. That's good investing in any economy.

The Law Offices of Moore Law Group, P.C. are pleased to offer a Legal Mediation and Reconciliation Program through our firm. This program is intended to follow the admonitions in 1 Corinthians 6 as to settling disputes as follows:

*If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. (1 Cor. 6:1, 5, 7)*

Under this program, Pastoral staff and Christian workers are offered a free telephone consultation concerning matter involving people within their ministries or work. Interested persons are entitled to a free consultation with an attorney.

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**Mediation Services**—This Mediation Program covers disputes in family law, employer-employee relations, business and financial matters.

**Family Law**—Our lawyers understand that when you go through a separation or divorce, feelings and emotions run high. At a time when you're under difficult stress, we will protect your interests and achieve the best possible result for you. At the same time, our attorneys understand your concerns for biblical principles related to families, children and separation. In some cases, substantial legal fees can be saved or avoided by proper legal counsel.

**Injuries and Accidents**—Our lawyers can help you get medical bills and lost wages paid, get your car repaired if necessary, and make certain you are fairly compensated for your damages.

**Wills and Probate**—Our lawyers can help you answer pertinent questions and plan estate protection for you and your family.

**Workers' Compensation and Employment Law**—If you are terminated from work, lose your job, or suffer discrimination, you may have a claim through various Employment Laws provided by either a state or federal regulation. Our attorneys will advise you on your rights as an employee in this regard.

**Consumer and Bankruptcy Law**—Debt collection, unfair trade practices and consumer credit are all governed by state and federal law in this area. Our attorneys can help you evaluate these areas, and in certain cases, recover attorneys fees and costs related to your case. We can also advise you as to bankruptcy options.

**General Litigation**—Our attorneys handle a variety of legal claims and issues that are resolved either through negotiation, mediation, arbitration or litigation.

**Criminal Defense**—Our attorneys have represented clients in matters ranging from DUI to Misdemeanor and Felony charges.

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## The Law and You . . .

**Question:** *How is family support calculated in a divorce?*

**Answer:** There are two basic support parts: first, as to child support, it is calculated according to Oregon State guidelines, based on the parties' income, costs of work related day care if any, and costs of health insurance for the children, while considering the number of overnights a child or children spend with each parent. [http://www.dcs.state.or.us/oregon\\_admin\\_rules/guidelines\\_information.htm](http://www.dcs.state.or.us/oregon_admin_rules/guidelines_information.htm).

The second part is spousal support, and is based, initially, on disparity of income, length of marriage, and the health and lifestyle considerations of the family. Check with us if you have further questions.

## About The Firm

**John Moore** has a background in Theology and Ethics. He graduated from Dallas Theological Seminary in Dallas, Texas, with a Masters and Doctoral Degree in 1974 and 1977, and was a Bible college professor and Family Counselor for a number of years. He graduated from Lewis and Clark Law School in Portland, Oregon. He is licensed in Oregon and Washington to practice law. His legal interests focus on Family Law, Personal Injury Representation and Criminal Defense.

**Steven R. Scharfstein** has a background in business and insurance. He graduated from U.C. Davis, with an MBA at the Univ. of New Mexico, and Lewis and Clark Law School. He is licensed in Oregon and Washington to practice law. His legal emphases are in the areas of Personal Injury, Business and Contract Law, and Real Estate Law, as well as Family Law. He comes to us substantial legal experience.

**Judy M. Moore** graduated from Lewis and Clark Law School. She is licensed to practice law in Oregon and Washington. Her legal emphasis is Estate Planning, Probate, Real Estate Investments and Transactions.

Moore Law Group also uses **'Of Counsel' Attorneys** on certain cases, to add specific experience or expertise related to the legal issues at hand. For example, Moore Law Group represents a client in the Class Action case against Vioux, which is currently being conducted in U.S. District Court in Louisiana; he further represents a client in the Class Action case against Hanford, which is ongoing in U.S. District Court in Washington. Further, John employs and uses various medical and other experts in a number of Wrongful Death cases currently pending or under investigation.

We continue to offer a free consultation to anyone who would like their legal concerns or issues reviewed, for which appointments are made through the main phone number and staff.