

When studying the Bible for the purpose of establishing the basis for a particular practice or tradition, it is always best to start at the beginning of the Bible and build upon a foundation of truth. God alone can dictate what is truth, and He does it by His words. Yeshua stated this during His last supper with His disciples when He said -

<sup>ESV</sup> **John 17:17** Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

God spoke His words of truth to Moses, and Moses wrote them down in a book<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, the Torah – words of God written by Moses – is where we begin the pursuit of truth.

As we saw in Part 1 of this series, the two words from which we get the word “forgive” are “nasa” (Strong’s 5375) and “salach” (Strong’s 5545) with the latter being the most common. But “salach” is not always translated “forgive”. In fact the first time we see the word, it is translated “pardon”. That verse reads –

<sup>ESV</sup> **Exodus 34:9** And he said, "If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance."

This was shortly after the golden calf incident when Moses was pleading on behalf of the people. Moses was hoping that YHVH would forgive their sin and take the Hebrews back as His inheritance. Thus we see that to “salach” is a way to restore a relationship, and this is just what we saw in the scriptures we studied in Part 1. Now we’re ready to move in to the New Testament, and if our foundation was built correctly, we should see the same thing – a pattern of repentance leading to forgiveness and ultimately a relationship restored.

Though one might expect that we would go directly to the gospels, I’ve chosen to skip over the gospels for now and go to the letters of the apostles instead. Why? Simply because Yeshua’s words are sometimes hard for us to understand. Yet His disciples understood them quite well – and they both lived and taught them after He died. I’ll give you an example.

In Matthew 12 we find the story of Yeshua and His disciples walking through a grain field on the Sabbath. Because they were hungry, they would occasionally grab a head of grain and eat it. His critics saw them do this and question Him as to why – being that it was the Sabbath – He allowed them to do such a thing. Yeshua’s answer was to recite the case of David, who when fleeing Saul, ate the old Showbread from the Tabernacle – something Yeshua claimed was “not lawful for him”.

Yeshua’s answer to the Pharisees is somewhat perplexing; nevertheless, many use it as proof text to show that He “did away with” the Sabbath. On the other hand, His disciples did understand what Yeshua was saying and apparently understood it to be supportive of the Sabbath. Why do we know? We know because they continued to teach and observe the Sabbath just as they had before.

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<sup>1</sup> Deut 31:9



When it comes to forgiveness, many take Yeshua's words out of context and use them to preach a message of universal grace and forgiveness without having to follow the law. Yet the example of the disciples – decades after Yeshua's death and resurrection – continued to teach repentance before forgiveness. Therefore, their response to their Teacher's words as shown by their action serves as a testimony to what He meant with His words.

With that, let's take a look at many of the passages in the epistles that pertain to forgiveness.

### The Disciples and Forgiveness

Our first example is also the first time we see forgiveness mentioned after Yeshua's crucifixion. At this point, the disciples had become somewhat bold in their message. At Pentecost, Peter had accused the Jewish leaders of murdering Yeshua, and just prior to this passage; they had been arrested and thrown in prison by the Sadducees for teaching about Yeshua presumably at the Temple. The next morning, after being released from prison by an angel, they returned to the Temple to teach. They were apprehended again, but this time taken directly to the High Priest, to whom they said –

<sup>ESV</sup> **Acts 5:30-32** The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. <sup>31</sup> God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give<sup>2</sup> repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. <sup>32</sup> And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

Right out of the box, they teach repentance before forgiveness. Why? Because that's what their teacher taught, and He taught it because that is what the prophets had taught.<sup>3</sup>

The next example is that of Simon the Sorcerer, who for a short time followed the disciples. Simon had promoted himself as a "man of God" though his ability to perform magic. When he came in contact with the disciples – men who could actually heal people, he wanted the power to do the same, and as if it could be sold, offered to buy that power from them. Peter rebuked Simon claiming he was poisoned by bitterness and bound in iniquity, and then told him –

<sup>ESV</sup> **Acts 8:22** Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you.

Again, Peter is teaching repentance before forgiveness, but in this case he said something very interesting. Notice that in Peter's statement, he indicated that it might not even be possible for him to be forgiven, based on his intentions. I take that as an indication that forgiveness would not be forthcoming until he proved – by his actions – that he had truly repented.

James also taught forgiveness after repentance, but again – you have to look for it. In his epistle, James spoke of healing in much the same way as his brother Yeshua did. He said –

<sup>ESV</sup> **James 5:14-15** "... is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup>

<sup>2</sup> "to give repentance" – the term "give" is from the Greek word "didomi" (Strong's 1325). Though in most cases translated "give", it can also be translated "grant". Isaiah 6:9, Jeremiah 7:12-16, as well as Hosea 13:14 speak of a time when God would not hear Israel's cries of repentance. Yeshua's death and resurrection made it possible for YHVH to hear Israel's cry.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Chron. 7:14



And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

The above passage shows that the “prayer of faith” helps bring forgiveness of sin so that one might receive healing, but it does not mention repentance. Where does that come in? It is found in the very next verse.

**James 5:16** Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

Confession has much to do with repentance. Very early in Matthew’s account of Yeshua’s life, he writes about John the Baptist – the man sent by God to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. One of the Messiah’s roles was to bring forgiveness for the sins of His people, but before that could be possible, there had to be repentance. Thus John taught confession as a step toward repentance –

<sup>ESV</sup> **Matthew 3:1–6** In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, <sup>2</sup> "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." <sup>3</sup> For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'" ... <sup>5</sup> Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, <sup>6</sup> and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

Peter was very much aware of John’s teaching. He understood that the Torah prescribed repentance before forgiveness, and he knew – as did John the Baptist – that confession (for instance, telling your brother that you stole from him) was part of the forgiveness process.

So we have examples of Peter and James teaching that repentance comes before forgiveness, but what about Paul? Did he follow the same pattern? Let’s see!

On one of Paul’s first trips with Barnabus, they were visiting a synagogue in Antioch in Pisidia, a city in Asia Minor. This portion of Asia Minor is also called “Gaul” and “Galatia” — understood by many to be an area where a large number of Hebrews from the northern tribes had settled after being released by the Assyrians hundreds of years earlier. Therefore, many who attended that synagogue were probably Hebrew, but were not Jews (see vs. 42)<sup>4</sup>.

After the reading of the Torah and Hatara portions<sup>5</sup>, Paul was asked if he would like to share anything with the congregation. He answered affirmatively and began to give a brief history of the Hebrew people starting with “the fathers” and concluding with John the Baptist and Yeshua. He showed that Yeshua had been crucified and raised from the dead so that through Him one might receive forgiveness of sin. He said –

<sup>ESV</sup> **Acts 13:38-39** Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything <sup>39</sup> from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.amiyisrael.org/articles/UnderstandingIsrael/understanding-israel-tribes.htm>

<sup>5</sup> It was a tradition in the 1<sup>st</sup> century synagogue system to read a portion of the Torah as well as a corresponding portion from the prophets each Sabbath. This custom exists even today in most Jewish synagogues.



You will notice that Paul not only mentioned forgiveness of sin—he also spoke of freedom. Not freedom from the law, but freedom from something the law could not provide – being deemed righteous in regards to intentional sin.

But where do we find repentance in this example? We find it by going back to Paul's story.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Acts 13:24-25** Before his coming, John had proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. <sup>25</sup> And as John was finishing his course, he said, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but behold, after me one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.'

What we see here is that Paul spoke of John the Baptist as if his audience knew him — even though this synagogue was located hundreds of miles from Jerusalem. Apparently John's message had made a tremendous impact on the Jewish people and had been widely taught throughout the region. Some even believed that John was the fulfillment of the messianic prophecies of the prophets<sup>6</sup>. To the Jewish people, John implied repentance. Though in his message Paul mentioned John as a reference of importance by which his audience should consider Yeshua, the underlying message is that John (repentance) came before Yeshua (forgiveness of sin).

Another example of Paul teaching repentance is in his letter to the Romans where he quotes Psalm 32 – one of David's psalms of confession and repentance –

<sup>ESV</sup> **Romans 4:7** "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are **forgiven**, and whose sins are covered;

Because Paul's audience was a mix of Jews and non-Jewish Hebrews, Paul would expect them to know the context of his quote. Therefore, continuing on in this psalm, David said –

**Psalm 32:5** I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah

In his psalm, David is showing that confession (an early step in the repentance process) comes before God forgives sin.

If you want a clear example of Paul's belief as to when a person should be forgiven, there is none better than 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 5 and its corresponding passage in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 2.

In 1 Corinthian's Paul writes that he had heard that the congregation was allowing a case of sexual deviance to continue within the congregation. Apparently a man had taken his deceased father's wife as a mate. We can assume the woman was his stepmother and not his biological mother, though today that might not be uncommon. This type of relationship is referenced in Leviticus -

<sup>ESV</sup> **Leviticus 18:8** You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife; it is your father's nakedness.

- and the penalty for such a relationship is –

<sup>ESV</sup> **Leviticus 18:29** For everyone who does any of these abominations, the persons who do them shall be cut off from among their people.

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<sup>6</sup> John 1:19–28



In Paul's letter, he excoriates the congregation for allowing this to continue and yet still have fellowship with the man. Paul – in no uncertain terms – tells the congregation to put the man out of the congregation –

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Corinthians 5:5** ... you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

— then makes this statement —

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Corinthians 5:6** Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

What were they boasting about? Were they boasting about their level of tolerance – that they were more merciful than God? Maybe they thought they were more forgiving than God? Whatever it was, Paul did not buy it, but instead said –

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Corinthians 5:13** ... "Purge the evil person from among you."

What Paul was getting at was that their tolerance – their forgiveness of this man was actually hurting him. Instead of imposing on him what God in the Torah prescribes for this type of offense so that God can deal with him, they were protecting him – reinforcing in his mind that his behavior was not that bad.

What is great about this example is that in his next letter to the Corinthians, he praised them for doing the right thing, and as a result, the man repented. True forgiveness could now be extended.

<sup>ESV</sup> **2 Corinthians 2:5-8** Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure- not to put it too severely- to all of you. <sup>6</sup> For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, <sup>7</sup> so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. <sup>8</sup> So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him.

Seeing that Paul consistently taught forgiveness after repentance, we can go to one more example from Paul's writings.

In the second half of Paul's epistle to the Colossian, he emphasized that they were to in effect "put to death" their old self and become like the Messiah. He emphasized becoming "one" as a body, then listed six specific traits they should wrap themselves in. These included compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and forbearance. He then said -

<sup>ESV</sup> **Colossians 3:13-15** " ...and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup> And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup> And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

Paul's seventh point was forgiveness, which he clarified by explaining that if a person has a complaint against another, there must ultimately be forgiveness. The Greek word for "complaint" is "momphe (3437) which simply means "a complaint." The complaint could be real or perceived, true or not true. Yeshua shows how to deal with these things in Matt. 5:23-25, Matt. 18:15-17, and Luke 12:58 which we will work through as we continue this series.



What we've seen in this installment is a good representation of what Paul and the disciples taught about forgiveness. Being that what they taught was simply a reflection of what their teacher – Messiah Yeshua had taught them, we can assume that He also taught forgiveness as a byproduct of repentance. If we couple that with the fact that the Tnakh also teaches forgiveness after repentance, we can then get a better grasp on what Yeshua meant in some of His teachings on forgiveness. We'll get into that next time.

Shalom Alechem