

# *It Is Written*

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## JUST AS GOD FORGAVE

*By Joe Fitch*

"And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:32). This passage demands that Christians forgive each other. It also sets a strict guide for this forgiving - "just as God in Christ forgave you." God is the perfect standard for forgiving, but what does "just as God forgave" include?

**God is willing to forgive.** No one twisted God's arm to grant forgiveness. Nothing demanded that he forgive - except that he willed to forgive. As God was unwilling for any to perish (2 Pet. 3:9), so he was willing to forgive all trespasses. Thus, you can count on God's mercy - "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jno. 1:9). Our standard is set! It is deeper than duty; it roots in the heart. We must be really willing to forgive.

**God is aggressive to forgive.** In regard to forgiveness, who approached who? Man did not make the first overture. It was God who reached out to man while he was still a sinner - still a rebel. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Again, the standard is set for us. Jesus said: "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Mt. 5:23-24). Jesus expected the "sinned against" to aggressively pursue forgiveness - even before offering his sacrifice. That emphasis mimics God. It is un-godlike to withhold forgiveness or to make no efforts toward forgiving one who sinned against us. "Just as God forgave" demands we make the first step.

**God forgives absolutely.** There are not hidden clauses, no reservations in God's forgiveness. In awe, the psalmist argued, "He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us" (Psa. 103:10). How far has he removed sins? - "as far as the east is from the west." God forgives - and completely disposes of sin. "Just as God forgave" sets a high bar! Our forgiveness must absolutely absolve our brother - completely erase all charges against him.

**God forgives permanently.** Sins forgiven never rise again. Jeremiah prophesied of God's covenant for the last days. It is quoted and applied in Hebrews. "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them." God's "last days" covenant was written in hearts rather than stone - as was his first covenant. Note the addendum: "then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more" (Heb. 10:16-17). How long is forgiveness? Remembered no more! No reprieve for a year? -- forever gone! "Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin" (v. 18). No need for more sacrifice for those sins; they are forgiven! They are done with forever. Other sins may plague - and separate from God, but God forgiven sins never are brought up again. Forgiveness is permanent! No strings attached. There is no other variety! "Just as God forgave" demands we forever loose the charges against a brother. We expect such from God; we must extend the same to a brother.

**God forgives conditionally.** All God's expansive mercy does not argue against conditions for forgiveness. God always placed repentance before forgiveness. There has never been unilateral forgiveness - God acting without man doing anything. God always first required sinners to "turn to God, and do works befitting repentance" (Acts 26:20). God did much to induce repentance, but no forgiveness was ever granted before or without repentance. That is how God forgives! - the only way God forgives!

What did Jesus say of those who refused to repent and come to him? "you will die in your sins" (John 8:24) - unforgiven. He also said of them: "where I go you cannot come" (8:21) - lost. "Just as God forgave" says we are also to seek - expect - require repentance so forgiveness may follow. Some expect Christians to be more

benevolent - more merciful than God. God does not forgive without repentance; neither does he require others to do so. Jesus said: "Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him" (Lk. 17:3-4). Notice, "if he repents." In no way does this excuse using repentance as an excuse for an unmerciful heart - it is not a scapegoat for not seeking to forgive. No one learned any such thing from God! Remember, "just as God forgave" demands "willing" and "aggressive" overtures to forgive.

"Just as God forgave" also is never a model for ignoring evil conduct -- and then calling it forgiveness.

## Impostors, Wars, and Persecution

By Clarence R. Johnson

Jesus taught that before the destruction of Jerusalem, many would come in His name, "saying, 'I am He,' and will deceive many. But when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled: for such things must happen, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These are the beginnings of sorrows. But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake for a testimony to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations" (Mark 13:5-10).

Jesus' words here are often incorrectly applied to His literal second coming and identified with current events. But all the things Jesus foretold through verse 30 were to be fulfilled in that generation, long before our time. And indeed, they were, as He said they would be.

False messiahs and false saviors appeared on the scene. Some of them are briefly mentioned in the Scriptures. Others were mentioned in historical accounts of the times. See Acts 8:9-10 and Acts 21:33. The Jewish historian Josephus tells us that during the time of Felix (mentioned in Acts 24), "The country was again filled with robbers and impostors, who deluded the multitude. Yet did Felix catch and put to death many of these impostors every day..." (Antiquities of the Jews, 20:3:5).

Jesus indicated that before the destruction of Jerusalem, there would be political intrigue, insurrection and turmoil. In fulfillment of His words, four Roman emperors died violently in a period of one and a half years. Various struggles and seditions in the Roman Empire at that time are too numerous to detail. Josephus' Wars of the Jews records armed battles between Jews and Syrians, between Galileans and Samaritans, between various elements of Jewish society against the Romans, etc.

There were earthquakes and famines, just as Jesus foretold. Acts 11:28 records one of the famines. Jewish and Roman historians have left accounts of at least one pestilence and five earthquakes during the time between Jesus' prediction and the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

Numerous Bible passages show how the apostles and their companions were persecuted, brought before kings and councils, etc. See Acts, chapters 4, 7, 12, etc. All these things were to precede the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple - and indeed they did.

The gospel was to be preached throughout the world. By 63 A.D., the apostle Paul could write: "The gospel...has come to you, as it has also in all the world... The gospel which you heard...was preached to every creature under heaven..." (Col. 1:5-6, 23).

## How do we measure up?

By Kyle Campbell

It's very common for man to compare something in physical or carnal ways. For instance, people tend to consider that they are a part of a great church as long as they have a nice, new building, several academic degrees for their "pastor/preacher," large numbers, and a good community image.

We are in a spiritual struggle (Ephesians 6:12), but more and more, congregations are trying to fight a war with the weapons of the enemy. They shamelessly rely on the arm of the flesh instead of the arm of God. This creates loss of conviction, a spirit of compromise, and a desire to be like others!

Jesus said, "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you!" (Luke 6:26). Sometimes standing for truth means standing virtually alone. However, you always know that God will be with you (2 Timothy 4:16-17). So stand strong and stand on the Bible, rejecting men's standards of success (1 Corinthians 16:13).