



The Forgiveness Debate

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If you missed last week's news, a high profile case was tried resulting in mixed reactions. In 2018, a Dallas police officer, Amber Guyger, shot and killed unarmed Botham Jean in his apartment. The officer claims she thought he was an intruder in her apartment, so she killed him. On Tuesday, she was found guilty of murder. On Wednesday, she was sentenced to ten years in prison. On Thursday, I rode to work listening to the forgiveness debate. The victim's younger brother, age 18, took the stand to give his victim's statement. In a quiet and somber manner, his necktie causing obvious irritation to his neck, said, "I speak for myself. I forgive you. And I know if you go to God and ask Him, He will forgive you." He continued to speak telling her he loves her, wants the best for her, that he doesn't even want her to go to jail. He advised her to give her life to God. He concluded by asking the judge if he could give her a hug.



[Watch Video from ABC News](#)

Brandt Jean's statement of forgiveness has caused many to question both their ability and willingness to forgive. I've heard people say they didn't know if they could forgive someone under the circumstances of murder. I've heard people say they might forgive her after ten or twenty years. People have said they might forgive her, but they wouldn't tell her. I've also heard discussion that the act of forgiveness was okay, but the hug went too far. What disheartens me is criticism of Brandt for his decision to forgive, when forgiveness is an expectation of the Christian heart.

~**Mark 11:25 ESV** And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

~**Matthew 6:14-15 ESV** For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

~**Luke 6:37 ESV** “Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven;

~**Ephesians 4:32 ESV** Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

The Bible leaves no question as to whether or not we should forgive those who cause us pain. We want God to “forgive our debts as we forgive our debtors.” (Matt. 6:12) Scripture also tells us that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Rom. 3:23) We may be unaware of how our sin affects another person, but in order for us to be in relationship with people and relationship with the Lord, we must practice forgiveness. Forgiveness is not for the benefit other person, it is for us. Forgiveness is that release of negative emotions, the cycle of hateful thoughts, and mental anguish we feel when we have been wronged. Forgiveness is not forgetting, but rather than constantly allowing our minds to keep running through the details of the debt, and adding on additional reasons to be angry, looking at it from different angles - when we forgive, we should intentionally stop that cycle.

Someone said they would forgive in ten or twenty years. Why wait, why allow your hurt to cloud your sunshine - to block your blessings, to prevent you from living your best life, for ten or twenty years! This weekend, someone on the radio said they might forgive her, but they wouldn't tell her. I do believe forgiveness is for our own heart, not so much the offender's, but when the offender knows he/she is the offender, and is suffering anguish because of it, telling that person that you have forgiven them multiplies the benefit. To forgive, but keep it a secret, may not be true forgiveness. According to my interpretation of Scripture, man's forgiveness is not necessary for a person to enter into heaven. Jesus came to earth and died on the cross as the sacrificial lamb for our trespasses. He said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." We can spend years hating someone, thinking about what they said or did, finding new reasons to hold on to the hurt, but if that person confesses his own sins, and repents, he is forgiven by the Lord. We can spend years suffering from the unwillingness to forgive, but our stubbornness does not prevent the other person from having unity in Christ. When we don't forgive, it disrupts our unity in Christ because as a part of our relationship with God, we are to “forgive our debtors.”

You may be able to tell that I have suffered from an unwillingness to forgive at some point in time. It's true, I have. I'm sure the person's name had been in my prayers multiple times, but I don't think it was there in terms of forgiveness. One evening, when I was speaking to the individual on my front porch, I said, “I forgive you.” Honestly, when I heard those words come out of my mouth it surprised me! Once I forgave, I didn't look at that person in the same way as I had in previous years. Rather than feeling victimized, I felt empowered by the Holy Spirit, that the past would no longer be a hindrance to the future. I was quite a bit older than 18 when I experienced this. I applaud Brandt Jean's decision to forgive. I think his actions demonstrate true maturity in the Lord, at a young age. The hug indicated that what he said, he meant. His were not empty words for his five minutes of fame. Forgiving the woman who murdered his brother was cake, telling her was icing, and the hug...strawberries!

Who do you need to forgive?