

Why Reconciliation Is Not a Component of Forgiveness: A Response to Frise and McMinn (2010)

Jichan J. Kim

University of Wisconsin-Madison

Robert D. Enright

University of Wisconsin-Madison

International Forgiveness Institute, Inc.

Frise and McMinn (2010) examined differing views of forgiveness among scholars and found that theologians were inclined toward the view of reconciliation being a necessary part of forgiveness while psychologists generally separated the two constructs. They suggest that forgiveness may be a continuum where subjective forgiveness is at one pole and relational forgiveness at the opposite. We attempt an explanation why theologians seem to struggle more to unite the two constructs and argue that human forgiveness must be distinguished from divine forgiveness. Forgiveness as love is always and without exception unconditional while divine forgiveness involves something more—the forgiveness of sins for those who return to God based on the crosswork of Jesus Christ. This distinction is crucial for both theologians and psychologists; while divine forgiveness results in reconciliation when persons accept Jesus and return to God in remorse and repentance, anyone who desires to forgive the offender should not be discouraged for any reason.

The purpose of this article is to respond to Frise and McMinn's (2010) article on the differing views of forgiveness and reconciliation among psychologists and Christian theologians. We are not necessarily responding to Frise and McMinn's view of forgiveness since theirs was an empirical study, but instead, we are trying to respond to some disagreeing theologians who conceptualize forgiveness differently from psychologists; as predicted by Frise and McMinn (2010) in the study, while psychologists were more clear about the distinction between forgiveness and reconciliation, theologians highly endorsed the view of the restoration of an ongoing relationship being part of forgiveness and saw that the two terms were, however complex, connected to each other. To make our case for forgiveness and reconciliation as distinct constructs, we will first introduce Frise and McMinn's (2010) study by stating the main issue in contention and the authors' concluding view on the controversy. Then, we will respond to Frise and McMinn (2010) by discussing the difference between person-to-person and divine

forgiveness, the idea of forgiveness as unconditional rather than conditional love, and the interplay of unconditional forgiveness and conditional reconciliation. Finally, we will emphasize the importance of perceiving the distinction between divine and person-to-person forgiveness. We argue that acknowledging the difference between divine forgiveness and person-to-person forgiveness is necessary to understand that forgiveness in the form of unconditional love is distinct from reconciliation because the former is always and without exception unconditional while the latter is not.

Introduction to Frise and McMinn (2010)

Frise and McMinn (2010) examined the differing views of psychologists and Christian theologians on whether or not reconciliation is a necessary component of forgiveness through an online survey distributed to scholars both in psychology and theology. In Study 1, academic psychologists from both Christian and non-Christian graduate departments of professional psychology associated with the National Council of Schools and Programs in Professional Psychology (NCSPP) ($n = 53$; 29% response rate) and Christian theologians from departments of theology, religion, or biblical studies associated with the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities

Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Jichan J. Kim, Department of Educational Psychology, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 859 Education Sciences, 1025 Johnson St., Madison, WI 53706-1796; jkim478@wisc.edu

(CCCU) ($n = 29$; 29% response rate) were asked to rate on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) each of the four statements: True forgiveness meant that a person 1) releases negative feelings toward the offender, 2) gives up a desire for revenge toward the offender, 3) develops positive feelings of goodwill toward the offender, and 4) is restored to an ongoing relationship with the offender. Following the survey, respondents were asked to reveal whether they believe that reconciliation is a necessary part of forgiveness or if it is a different construct, which became the basis for the authors' qualitative analysis. Additionally, the psychologists in Study 1 were asked about their religiosity by rating on a Likert scale (from 1 not at all important to 5 highly important; it is the center of my life) the importance of religion in their lives; the respondents who rated a 5 on the religiosity scale were labeled as "more" religious psychologists as opposed to the rest who were labeled "less" religious psychologists. For Study 2, an identical survey was conducted with psychologists from psychology departments ($n = 25$) and Christian theologians from theology departments and one philosopher studying both fields ($n = 7$) who have previously published on the topic of forgiveness to solicit their expert opinions.

The results of Study 1 showed that concerning the fourth statement about reconciliation as being part of forgiveness, "more" religious psychologists showed the significantly lowest endorsements compared to both "less" religious psychologists and theologians. In Study 2, expert theologians' endorsements of the fourth statement were significantly higher than expert psychologists. Also, through the qualitative responses, it was confirmed that while psychologists tended to emphasize the clear distinction between forgiveness and reconciliation, theologians tended to emphasize the complex connections between forgiveness and reconciliation in differing circumstances.

In conclusion, Frise and McMinn (2010) proposed a solution for integrating two schools of thought: Forgiveness might be on a continuum where on its one end is the subjective aspect of forgiveness with an emphasis on inner healing while on the other end is the relational aspect of forgiveness with an emphasis on reconciliation. In their conclusion, although they tried not to discount what they called subjective forgiveness, they hinted at their view on the controversy that

the relational aspect of forgiveness—the restoration of an ongoing relationship with the offender—is still necessary to restore broken relationships among individuals, communities, and nations.

The Issue of Contention: Is Reconciliation Part of Forgiveness?

Frise and McMinn (2010) examined whether or not true person-to-person forgiveness consists of the four components described above. Among scholars, there is a general consensus on the inclusion of the development of positive changes toward the offender as part of person-to-person forgiveness (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; McCullough & Witvliet, 2002). One generally accepted definition for interpersonal forgiveness is as follows: In the face of injustice, the forgiver, without denying her right to resentment, willingly gives up her right to resentment and tries to develop kindness, compassion, and even love toward the offender who does not necessarily deserve such gifts (Enright, 2001). Forgiveness is more than how the forgiver feels about the offender (affect) but also how he or she thinks (cognition) and acts (behavior) toward the offender (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Enright, Gassin, & Wu, 1992; Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991). Thus, positive changes are anticipated in the domains of affect, behavior, and cognition. This view of forgiveness that involves positive changes toward the offender was further confirmed by Frise and McMinn's (2010) study where the first three parts of forgiveness were widely accepted among psychologists and theologians except for the case with "less" religious psychologists in the study who tended to agree with only the first two parts.

The issue of contention, and the basis of this article, is the fourth dimension studied by Frise and McMinn (2010): Is reconciliation part of what it means to forgive or are these two constructs distinct? As we have seen, there are contrary views expressed by different groups, primarily between certain psychologists and theologians; while psychologists generally saw the distinction between the two, theologians more highly endorsed the fourth dimension of forgiveness (reconciliation) and some of them in their qualitative responses expressed complex connections between the two. Can we resolve this difference by rational means?

We will be reasoning in this article that the basic discrepancy between the groups lies in this: Theologians might be trying to perceive person-to-person forgiveness within their perspective of

divine forgiveness. The essence of our conclusion (to be argued here) is this: God forgives sins (distinct from interpersonal offenses), but humans do not. Thus, reconciliation is not seen as part of interpersonal forgiveness. Divine forgiveness of sins, on the other hand, does include reconciliation between God and the forgiven person because God, who offered the gift of forgiveness on the Cross of Christ, desires to reconcile with all those who have faith in Jesus and return to Him in remorse and repentance.

Our Argument

People, in the face of injustice, forgive the offender despite the wrong that they suffered from the hands of another. In divine forgiveness, God freely offers forgiveness of sins, based on His unconditional love, for the purpose of reconciliation with sinners (Romans 5:8-11; 1 John 4:9-10; Volf, 2005; Stanley, 1991). Compared to human forgiving, God does something more; He removes sins from those who have faith in Jesus and return to Him in remorse and repentance (Luke 5:32; Acts 3:19; Ephesians 2:8; Grudem, 1995). Thus, divine forgiveness must be seen as something of a dual nature: God unconditionally draws people in love, but conditionally removes sins from those who return to God (Enright, Gassin, & Wu, 1992; Enright, Eastin, Golden, Sarinopoulos, Freedman, 1992; Erickson, 1998; Stanley, 1991). Here, it should be clarified that we are not arguing that divine forgiveness is dependent on humans. It is God who chose to restore His relationship with us through first drawing us in love through the Cross of Jesus Christ and then, reconciling with us by canceling the sins of those who accept Jesus as their Savior. It is, in fact, God who is renewing His covenant with us based on the blood of Jesus Christ shed on the Cross (Matthew 26:27-28; Hebrews 8:6-13; Seibold, 2001). Only by His grace (thus, unconditional) is such forgiveness of sins offered in the first place for those who would return, and thus, it is clear that it is still God who is in charge of saving people (Ephesians 2:4-5). Yet, in order for us to truly accept and appreciate what Christ has done for us, we need to be aware of what we did (our sins) and to be motivated to change, which is evidenced in our remorse and repentance. Then, the difference between divine forgiveness and person-to-person forgiveness is this: Although in both, unconditional forgiving love is offered to offenders (John 13:34-35), sins (distinct

from interpersonal offenses) are forgiven only in divine forgiveness that takes place only when sinners respond to and receive God's gift of forgiveness (Luke 5:21; Johansson, 2011; Volf, 2005).

Some theologians might be confused because divine forgiveness has a clear purpose and action, that is, to restore broken relationships between God and persons so that we may enjoy peace with God once again; Jesus died for us on the Cross because He loved us and wanted to reconcile with us through forgiveness of sins (2 Corinthians 5:18; Romans 5:8-11; Colossians 1:20-22). However, in human forgiveness, reconciliation is not part of forgiveness because it does not involve forgiveness of sins that leads to reconciliation in divine forgiveness. In other words, human forgiveness can take place apart from the two (or more) people reconciling even though reconciliation is a goal of this forgiveness most of the time. To put it as plainly as possible, divine forgiveness has both the purpose and action of reconciliation which takes place through unconditional love and conditional forgiveness of sins. Person-to-person forgiveness has the purpose, but not necessarily the action of, reconciliation, and takes place through unconditional love only (with the possibility of waiting in the hope of reconciliation). The forgiven one may spurn reconciliation with the other person. God, on the other hand, forgives the sin when the person is ready to be forgiven and to reconcile.

Prominent theologians have attempted to understand what it means to forgive others as persons who are forgiven in God (Colossians 3:13; Ephesians 4:32). Jones (1995) argues that Christian forgiveness needs to focus on "the reconciliation of brokenness, the restoration of communion—with God, with one another, and with the whole Creation" (p. xii). We agree that in forgiving others, Christians must have the purpose of reconciliation with offenders whenever possible. In fact, Christians are called to the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18; Schreiter, 1992). However, reconciliation is still not necessarily part of the action of forgiveness because in divine forgiveness, God does something more than what humans do in forgiving, that is, the divine canceling of sins that precedes reconciliation. Without the possibility of reconciliation with the offender, forgivers can still heal their own emotional wounds, offer unconditional love to the offender as best as they can, and then as its purpose wait in the hope of reconciliation (which may never come). Then, forgiveness—interpersonal forgiveness—cannot be an

individualized, privatized act, as Jones (1995) criticizes, because it is always in the context of loving action with a purpose of the betterment of the other(s) and the possibility of reconciliation.

Volf (2005), although he acknowledges that God's gift of forgiveness was unconditionally sent to all, reasons that forgiveness is not complete in and of itself unless it is received by humans. He argues that as a gift, it is sent with certain recipients in mind. We agree that a gift is sent in anticipation of being received. Yet, we contend that the divine action of unconditional forgiveness on the Cross (Jesus drawing humanity to himself through this unconditional act of love) was already complete in that it was a perfect act of love, but the forgiveness of sins (as an action between God and persons) that leads to reconciliation is not complete unless humans accept the gift of forgiveness from God for a restored relationship with Him, the latter of which humans do not resemble God in their forgiving.

Other Christian scholars also recognize this impossibility of reconciliation without the canceling of sins; the holy and righteous God who cannot overlook the seriousness of sins demands that our sins are forgiven first before reconciling with us (Morris, 1965; Stott, 2006). However, this does not suggest that the offering of unconditional forgiving love (as a moral virtue), distinct from the forgiveness of sins, is not complete without reconciliation; thus, human forgiving that only involves the former is a complete in and of itself (as a virtuous action) without an ongoing relationship with the offender. Again, to be as clear as possible, the love of forgiveness can be a complete and unconditional act of virtue in and of itself. Love, of course, is not fulfilled until the other joins in love. Yet, even if the other fails to join in love, the unconditional action of forgiving love is a complete action of virtue in and of itself apart from others' response to that love. Thus, we are making a distinction between a complete expression/action of a virtue *qua* virtue and the complete fulfillment of it.

Therefore, some theologians who see reconciliation as a necessary part of forgiveness are in need of reevaluating what aspects of human forgiving resemble divine forgiving without attempting to discuss human forgiveness within their perspective of divine forgiveness (Hamman, 2012). We agree that reconciliation is crucial, and our gift of forgiveness is sent in hopes of being received, but it is as important to see that the absence of reconciliation does not make

human forgiveness incomplete as the expression of virtuous love.

Forgiveness as Unconditional Rather Than Conditional Love

To bolster our point that human forgiveness itself, distinct from divine forgiveness of sins, consists of unconditional rather than conditional love, we would like to defend this contention with three points. A clarification is needed here; by unconditional, we do not mean that forgiveness is easy. Empirical studies show that forgiveness often takes very long (Baskin & Enright, 2004). In fact, what we mean by unconditional here is that there is nothing that hinders us from forgiving others if we choose to do so. Why do we claim that human forgiveness is unconditional? First, forgiveness is seen as a moral virtue by philosophers (North, 1987; Holmgren, 1993) and by social scientists (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). By moral virtue, we mean a sense of goodness that develops first within a person as an understanding and motivation to do good, which then flows out to others for their good (see Simon, 1986 for a discussion of the term moral virtue). If forgiveness is a moral virtue, as are justice, patience, and kindness, then it will share the essence of all other moral virtues. Second, all other moral virtues are unconditionally expressed as part of their essence. For example, one can be just in the face of another's injustice. Can we imagine the chaos in society if a person driving a car can only appropriate the justice of stopping at a stop light after someone else does something? It is the same with kindness. Must we refrain from kindness until certain actions are forthcoming from others? No other moral virtue requires specific conditions for its expression. Why would forgiveness be the grand exception? Third, if forgiveness were conditional on another's prior response such as repentance, then the potential forgiver is trapped in unforgiveness until the other behaves in certain ways. Being trapped with burning resentment is hardly leading the abundant life. Conditional forgiveness, then, as the grand exception to all other moral virtues as unconditional, seems unlikely.

On the Interplay of Unconditional Forgiveness and Conditional Reconciliation

By the above reasoning, human forgiveness, distinct from the forgiveness of sins in divine forgiveness, is always and without exception

unconditional. Surely forgiveness can occur if another repents as in Luke 17:3, but this must be read in full context. The call to forgiveness here has to be a sufficient condition for forgiving (the other's repentance is adequate for one to forgive), but it cannot be seen as a necessary condition (one must wait for the other to repent); otherwise we have a contradiction in biblical texts. Neither Joseph forgiving his brothers in Genesis (chapters 37-45) nor the father of the prodigal son waited for repentance before showing unconditional love in the form of forgiveness to others. Biblical texts support our reasoning above that forgiveness must be unconditional. Matthew 6:14-15 where both divine and human forgiving are dealt simultaneously should be read more carefully. We believe that the passage is meant for followers of Christ. If we remain unforgiving toward others after accepting Jesus (through conditional divine forgiveness of sins), are we really sorry for our own sins? We are sinning by being unforgiving. Thus, as revealed in Jesus' response to Peter's answer about how many times we should forgive our brothers and sisters, we, rather than being the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18, are to be unconditionally and unlimitedly forgiving toward others as the ones who already experienced the depth of God's love.

On the other hand, reconciliation always and without exception is conditional. It should be first noted that reconciliation is quite different from just staying in a relationship. As seen in the fourth dimension of forgiveness examined in Frise and McMinn (2010), it is an on-going relationship actively restored through both parties coming together in trust (Enright, 2001; Worthington, 2003). Such evidence of the unjustly acting person becoming trustworthy often takes the form of observed remorse, repentance, and recompense of some kind and within reason. Forgiveness can occur unconditionally before demonstrated acts of reconciliation, but reconciliation is different in that it requires such demonstrations from the offending party so that trust between the two may be restored. You can unconditionally forgive and hope that the offending party changes, but reconciliation requires two parties coming together in trust.

Does our argument and portrayal of forgiveness as unconditional then render this term as a passive activity? By this we mean, is unconditional forgiveness simply an internal transformation of feeling better without an active engagement

with the other? An affirmative answer would be a distortion of what unconditional forgiveness is. Was Jesus being passive on the Cross as He was tortured, dying, and yet continued offering love to all? He was asking the Father to forgive. He was caring for his mother and for John and for all of humanity. He was welcoming a thief into paradise. We, too, when we unconditionally forgive, can offer an unrepentant person our time, a smile, and some instruction on leading a better life. Unconditional loving forgiveness is hardly passive and hardly an interior transformation only.

Why the Distinction Between Human Forgiving and Divine Forgiving?

In understanding forgiveness, we have to ask first what we, in human forgiving, resemble and what we do not resemble from divine forgiving. God offers the moral virtue of forgiveness unconditionally, through the selfless act of Jesus's drawing all persons to himself on the Cross. God then offers the forgiveness of sins, an act of reconciliation, only when people come repentantly to him. Humans engage through imitation (Ephesians 5:1-2) and unity with Christ (John 17:20-21) the unconditional exercise of the moral virtue of forgiveness. Humans stop short of the second of God's acts, the forgiveness of sins. When social scientists and theologians fail to make these important distinctions between unconditionally exercising the moral virtue of forgiving and the act of forgiving sins, these two related but distinct actions of God can be conflated and erroneously mapped onto the human condition with the logically-unwarranted conclusion that people who forgive must, and without exception, reconcile with offenders to claim full forgiveness. Table 1 illustrates this distinction between divine and person-to-person forgiveness. We are not arguing against the benefits of the interplay of forgiving, receiving forgiveness, and reconciliation. In fact, this interplay could be seen as the fulfillment of an end in the process of forgiveness. By using the word fulfillment, we do not mean to imply that reconciling becomes part of forgiving. We can think of at least eight different reasons why one might exercise the virtue of forgiveness. These comprise eight different endpoints toward which forgiveness aims: 1) to feel better, which is not self-serving if by getting better, one can give goodness to others; 2) to aid the other's change of course and develop more

Table 1
The Difference Between Divine and Person-to-person Forgiveness

	1. Unconditional Love	2. Canceling of Sins	3. Reconciliation
Divine Forgiveness	God demonstrated His unconditional forgiving love for sinners through the Cross of Christ.	God cancels sins only when sinners have faith in Jesus Christ and repent.	Sinners are reconciled to God when their sins are canceled.
Person-to-Person Forgiveness	As we forgive, we offer unconditional forgiving love toward offenders.	We cannot forgive offenders' sins (distinct from interpersonal offenses).	We seek reconciliation with offenders only when it is possible. Therefore, reconciliation is not a necessary component of forgiveness.

Note. This is a modified version of the table that first appeared in Kim and Enright (2014).

mercy; 3) to reconcile with the other; 4) to be an example for others; 5) to grow in the virtue of forgiveness and become a forgiving person; 6) to become proficient in the virtue of forgiveness and pass it along to others; 7) to be in the will of God; 8) just because forgiving as a virtue is good in and of itself. Then, one must be careful not to equate what forgiving is with one of its fulfilled endpoints. Without the fulfillment of any number of the ends mentioned above, forgiveness does not lack anything to be considered a virtuous act. The unconditional love offered through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ was certainly demonstrated—meaning was complete in and of itself—without its fulfilled end in divine reconciliation with sinners. Thus, forgiveness may be a necessary component of reconciliation placed in the process toward the hope of reconciliation but must not be equated with its fulfilled end, namely, reconciliation.

Conclusion and Implications

We do not intend to undermine the importance of reconciliation in person-to-person forgiveness. In fact, the hope of reconciliation can motivate the wronged to seek forgiveness for a restored relationship with the other as stated above. Then, just as God the Father freely expressed His forgiving love toward humanity through the Cross of Christ, anyone who is unjustly hurt must be able to freely forgive the other even without the possibility of reconciliation. If forgiveness is considered incomplete or of a quality that is less complete without the presence of reconciliation on the continuum of forgiveness as insinuated by Frise and McMinn's (2010) proposal, then the freedom to imitate the love of Christ and be unit-

ed with Him on the Cross is unfairly withheld from all those who desire to forgive. If people are instructed to withhold all that is forgiveness until the other shows remorse and repents, we are introducing a dangerous distortion that could impact on the injured party's well-being. Thus, forgiveness must always remain unconditional without exception.

Also, we must not equate the second act of divine forgiveness—the forgiveness of sins—with the offering of unconditional forgiving love. Divine forgiveness freely offered to everyone does not lead to universal salvation of all people. Now that forgiveness as an act of love has been offered through the Cross of Christ, God is faithfully waiting for all sinners to return and accept Jesus for the canceling of sins and reconciliation. This conditional reconciliation leaves us much hope for the future—all who return to God with appropriate responses in the heart through remorse and repentance will enjoy the reality of reconciliation because the holy and loving God desires to reconcile with us.

Making distinctions between divine and person-to-person forgiveness is vital if psychologists and pastors are to give accurate counsel to the hurting. Those wishing to forgive need to know at least these five things: 1) they are free to offer unconditional love to the other; 2) such love is not passive and interior only; 3) they are not forgiving sins by such love; 4) their unconditional love does not automatically lead to their reconciliation with a harmful other; 5) to forgive makes possible the fulfillment of one end toward which forgiveness points, that is, reconciliation, which is related to but distinct from what it means to forgive. Further, those

wishing to be forgiven by God need to know at least these five things: 1) they already have received the unconditional love from God in the second person of the trinity on the Cross; 2) God's forgiveness of them is not exactly the same as their forgiving those who have offended them (because persons do not forgive sins); 3) God does not grant universal salvation—the forgiveness of sins—just because he loves unconditionally; 4) those who seek God's forgiveness need to keep these dual actions simultaneously in mind: God offers forgiving love unconditionally and he forgives sins conditionally after the sinner does the hard work of remorse and repentance to be forgiven; 5) To be forgiven of our sins, and thus to be reconciled to God, implies that we have received God's unconditional forgiveness.

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Authors

Jichan J. Kim is a graduate student in the Human Development area in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He has Master's degrees from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (MA & MDiv) and Harvard University (EdM). His research focuses on the psychology and theology of forgiveness and Christian educational ministries.

Robert D. Enright is a full professor in the Human Development area in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He has pioneered the scientific study of forgiveness, which he now has been studying for nearly three decades. He has a PhD in Educational Psychology from the University of Minnesota.

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