

God knows us omnipotently as our Creator and Lord. Yet he does not destroy us with this knowledge but originates and guarantees our authentic freedom. Only as sinners opposing God's will do we experience his foreknowledge as burden and bondage. True freedom implies the possibility of serving, not defying, God.

See also [Elect, Election](#); [Molinism](#)

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Forgiveness. Seven words in Scripture denote forgiveness: three in Hebrew and four in Greek. In the Hebrew OT they are *kipper* (to cover), *nāśā'* (to bear or to take away [guilt]), and *sālah* (to pardon). *Nāśā'* is used of both divine and human forgiveness. The other two are used only of divine forgiveness.

In the Greek NT the words are *apolyein*, *charizesthai*, *aphesis*, and *paresis*. *Apolyein* is used only once in regard to forgiveness (Luke 6:37). *Paresis* occurs only once (Rom. 3:25), suggesting "putting aside" or "disregarding." For the righteous God to do this, Christ Jesus had to be "displayed publicly as a propitiation" (Rom. 3:25 NASB). Only Paul uses *charizesthai* for "to forgive sins" (e.g., 2 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 4:32; Col. 2:13; 3:13), especially expressing the graciousness of God's forgiveness. The most common NT word for forgiveness is *aphesis*. This noun occurs fifteen times conveying "sending away" or "letting go." The verb (*aphiēmi*) with the same meaning is found about forty times.

No religious book except the Bible teaches that God completely forgives sin, but there it is frequently taught, as in, "I will heal their waywardness and love them freely" (Hosea 14:4); "in Christ God forgave you" (Eph. 4:32); "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more" (Heb. 10:17). The initiative of this forgiveness is God's (2 Cor. 12:13; Col. 2:13), as shown in the parable of the prodigal son / gracious father (Luke 15:11–32).

There is only one sin for which the Father does not promise forgiveness: blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:32; Mark 3:29). The contexts suggest that this sin is attributing to unclean spirits the Spirit's work, but many interpreters (including Augustine) have understood it to include deliberate persistence in such evil. This sin is also considered by some to be the unforgiving spirit (see Matt. 18:34–35) and might be the same as the "sin that leads to death" (1 John 5:16).

There are to be no limitations whatever to forgiving others. In Luke 17:4 it is to be "seven times in a day," and in Matthew 18:22 until "seventy-seven times," both probably signifying limitlessness. Forgiveness should be our attitude even before the offender's request, as implied by Jesus's "unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart" (Matt. 18:35).

For us to receive forgiveness, repentance is necessary (Luke 17:3–4). For the holy God to extend forgiveness, the shedding of blood (Heb. 9:22) until no life is left (Lev. 17:11) is

prerequisite—ultimately, the once-for-all (Heb. 9:26) spilling of Christ’s blood and his rising again (Rom. 4:25).

Recent theological treatments have emphasized that forgiveness does not require literal forgetting or consist in mere speaking of words. Like God’s forgiveness of us, it involves us in embodied practices of reconciliation.

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Form. See [AESTHETICS](#)

Formation. See [EDUCATION](#); [SPIRITUALITY](#); [WISDOM](#)

Form Criticism. Form criticism (Ger. *Formgeschichte*, “form history”) is a method applied to biblical and nonbiblical literature alike; it has been applied to both Testaments (especially, in the OT, to the Pentateuch and the Psalter), but preeminently to the Gospels. It endeavors to get behind the written Gospels and their literary sources to the oral tradition, classifying the various “forms,” or types of story, utterance, and so forth, represented.

Its pioneer was Martin Dibelius, whose *Die Formgeschichte des Evangeliums* appeared in 1919, followed in 1921 by Rudolf Bultmann’s independent *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*.

Classification. The main division in form classification of the Gospel material is between narratives and sayings. Narratives have been divided into (1) pronouncement stories, (2) miracle stories, and (3) stories about Jesus’s sayings, which have been subdivided into (a) wisdom sayings, (b) prophetic and apocalyptic sayings, (c) law pronouncements and community rules, (d) sayings introduced by “I,” and (e) parables.

Pronouncement stories have the character of both narratives and sayings. A particular situation elicits a pointed saying (an “apophthegm,” in Bultmann’s terminology), for the sake of which the incident was recorded. Frequently the situation is controversial; Jesus or his disciples being criticized, Jesus replies with a decisive pronouncement (e.g., Mark 2:27).

Pronouncement stories sometimes overlap other subdivisions; for example, the paralytic of Capernaum (Mark 2:1–12) is a pronouncement story leading up to “the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (Mark 2:10), but it is also a miracle story. Healing stories can be readily recognized; their globally recurrent form stresses the disease’s intractability, the cure’s completeness, and the spectators’ response. But this stereotyped form tells us nothing about historicity, which is also true of other “stories about Jesus” (such as the baptism, the temptation, the transfiguration, the resurrection appearances) sometimes called “myths” or “legends.” These designations may obscure the fact that form criticism theoretically judges form, not substance. Similarly, classification according to form throws little light on sayings’ authenticity; much more depends on the form critic’s view of Jesus.

Framework. Many form critics envisage the Synoptic tradition as consisting of unrelated incidents and sayings woven into a continuous narrative of editorial summaries devoid of