

Forgiving One Another

In today's text, we see that one of the distinctives of the Christian is his/her ability and willingness to forgive those who have sinned against him/her.

Ephesians 4: 30–32

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. **31** Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. **32** Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

We can define forgiveness as the cancellation of a debt owed to us, along with the replacement of bitter attitudes, words, and actions with those of love. Forgiveness is a choice we make. It is a skill we develop.

Let's observe from our text:

I. Believers have a unique motivation to forgive (vs. 30)

There are many studies available which demonstrate that forgiveness is beneficial to our physical and psychological health and that we also bless other people when we forgive them. The Christian is aware and appreciative of these things, but he is especially motivated by the effect of our forgiveness upon God Himself! He is "grieved" when we fail to forgive others.

II. Believers have a unique method of forgiveness (vs. 31-32)

The gifts that we have been given are the result of His supreme rule and reign over every power and authority.

A. We confess our unforgiving spirit and our contribution to the dissolution of the relationship. Notice that the Apostle tells us Christians that we must put off the old ways—we so easily fall back into worldly behavior, and we need to confess it.

B. We convert our conduct. Notice that we replace the old ways with new attitudes and actions. This is the power of the Holy Spirit living within us.

C. We contemplate God's forgiveness of our sins. Read Mt. 18:21-35 and notice that our forgiveness of others grows out of our having been forgiven by God.

III. Believers have a unique model of forgiveness (vs. 32b)

Paul says that we are to forgive "as God in Christ forgave you." How did He forgive us?

A. He completely cancelled our debt by substituting for us.

When we forgive others, we "let them off the hook." We release them from indebtedness to us, and we do this by absorbing the losses ourselves—out of love for the other person. This is what Jesus did for us. We can see a beautiful example of Christian imitation of Christ in the life of Stephen, the a Church's first martyr, when he cried to God, even as he was being stoned, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them."

B. He restores us through initiating with us. Jesus not only provided the substitutionary sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins, but He also pursued us and wooed us to His love. Look how He restored Peter in John 21:15-19, after Peter had famously denied Him publicly three times. We must, therefore, also seek restoration and reconciliation with those who have offended us.

Discussion Questions

1. What is forgiveness? Why are both the objective aspects (canceling the specific debt) and the subjective aspects (replacing bitterness with kind thoughts, words, and deeds) of forgiveness necessary for the believer?

2. What is unique about Christian forgiveness?

3. What do we do in the case when we have been offended but the offending party does not admit his sin?

4. What do we do when the offending party continues to hurt us?

5. Why is forgiveness often so difficult?

Going Deeper

1. Is there anyone in your life that you have not fully forgiven? Are you ready to take appropriate action? If not, why not?

2. Have you fully received God's forgiveness for all your sins? Do you truly believe that Jesus' death on Calvary's cross paid the full penalty for your sin?