

Forgiving One Another

Introduction. There was once a little boy who was shooting rocks with a slingshot. He could never hit his target. As he was in his Grandma's backyard one day, he spied her pet duck. On impulse he took aim and let fly. The stone hit, and the duck was dead. The boy panicked and hid the bird in the woodpile, only to look up and see his sister watching. After lunch that day, Grandma told Sally to help with the dishes. Sally responded, "Johnny told me he wanted to help in the kitchen today. Didn't you Johnny?" She whispered to him, "Remember the duck!" So, Johnny did the dishes. What choice did he have? For the next several weeks he was at the sink often. Sometimes for his duty, sometimes for his sin. So weary of the chore, he decided that any punishment would be better than washing more dishes, so he confessed to killing the duck. "I know, Johnny," his Grandma said, giving him a hug. "I was standing at the window and saw the whole thing. Because I love you, I forgave you. I wondered how long you would let Sally make a slave out of you." He had been pardoned, but he thought he was guilty. Why? He had listened to the words of his accuser.

This little story may bring a smile to your face, but it illustrates a deep problem that someone suffers from just about everywhere I have been. The scriptures make it clear about the place of forgiveness in a Christian life. Forgiveness is a two-way street. Forgiveness must work between God and man and man and man (Matthew 6:14-15).

Carrying a grudge and having an unforgiving spirit carries a high price tag. Generous and noble minds are able to forgive, while weak and ineffective minds are unable to forgive. Plato once said that the greatest gift a man can give is forgiveness. I want us to look at how forgiveness relates between God and man and how it relates between each of us.

I. ***Forgiveness Begins With God***

- A. Forgiveness is a free dismissal or a full release. It is a favor granted. It is not probation; a trial or testing of conduct or character. It is never a "wait and see" proposition.
- B. In the Old and New Testaments, our God is a God of forgiveness (Daniel 9:9; Nehemiah 9:17; Acts 5:31). Even the scribes and Pharisees realized that God would forgive sins (Luke 5:21).
- C. Our God is also one of abundant forgiveness (Isaiah 55:7). When God pardons us for our sins, He is satisfied that nothing else is needed to remove those sins. Under the Old Law, continual sacrifices meant remembrance of sin, but the blood of Christ washed away our sins to where God would remember them no more. That forgiveness was completely sufficient (Hebrews 8:12; 10:17-18).

D. God extends forgiveness through Christ's blood to all who will have faith, repent of their sins, confess Jesus as Christ and be baptized for the remission of sins (Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 9:22). This ultimate forgiveness teaches us how to forgive others.

II. ***Forgiveness Must Continue With Man***

A. As God has forgiven us, we must forgive others. Jesus, after being asked by Peter how many times he should forgive, taught His disciples the lesson of forgiveness (Matthew 18:21-35). If we do not forgive, God will not forgive us. God never asks the impossible!

B. Consider two examples of those who were able to forgive:

1. We should have the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5; 1 Peter 2:23-25). After being beaten and tried, Christ hung from His cross and spoke the words in Luke 23:34.

2. Joseph, in Genesis 45, makes his identity known to his brothers who sold him into slavery so many years before.

a) The word forgiveness is not in the chapter, but it is written on every line.

b) For Joseph, the past is the past. With hugs, kisses and tears, he urges them to look to the future (vss. 5, 9-11, 14-15).

C. We must rise above the standard of the world. When we talk about our dealings with others, we can react in one of three ways:

1. We can return evil for good -- the Satanic reaction.

a) This is like someone saying, "I am not going to have anything to do with you." Does God limit His response or dealings with you once He has forgiven you?

b) Mahatma Gandhi said, "The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute only of the strong" (cf. Matthew 18:26-28).

2. We can return good for good -- the worldly reaction.

a) Most brethren are satisfied with this reaction (Luke 6:32-34).

b) When someone offends me and asks for my forgiveness, which I give to them, I have not acted any differently than just about anybody in the world.

3. We can return good for evil -- the godly reaction.

a) The basis of Christian ethics calls us to a higher standard than Satan's and the world's (Luke 6:35-36; 1 Thessalonians 5:15; Romans 12:14; 1 Peter 3:8-9). So many times we are willing to forgive, but only if the other person asks us to forgive them (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13; 2 Timothy 4:16)..

b) Did Joseph's brothers ask Joseph to forgive them? Did Christ's enemies ask Him to forgive them? Do you really think we ought to hinge our forgiveness of others on whether or not they asked for our forgiveness?

D. However, people might object and say, "Yes I know I should forgive, but you just don't know how people have hurt me!" or "You don't know how long this pain has been on me!" Has it been longer than Joseph's? Longer than Christ's? Longer than God's?

1. Christ's bearing our sins in His body reflects what God had been bearing on His heart right from creation. It might well be that for some, the only way God's forgiveness will become real is through our forgiving them.
2. Who understands forgiveness best, a well-read scholar who harbors bitterness toward his brethren, or someone who can barely understand the scriptures who has joyfully forgiven a stream of terrible injuries?
3. If God is willing to forget our sins, should we not be willing to forget other's transgressions? Do you want to bury the hatchet and leave the handle sticking out? Forgiveness is difficult because it calls on us to dig deep for self-control.

Conclusion. Just like in the old days when seals were put in hot wax, a Christian who has a forgiving spirit can be sure when God has sealed the forgiveness of sins in his heart. The work that we have to do is far more important than grudge carrying. The church of our Lord is no place for those who cannot forgive others. He that cannot forgive others breaks down the bridge over which he himself must pass.

The end goal of forgiveness and a right attitude toward others is being mature and complete like God (Matthew 5:48). The whole idea is to make us like God. We build our grace by learning to forgive those who do not ask or do not deserve forgiveness. Proverbs 24:17 says, "Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth."