

FORGIVENESS VS. REJECTION

CLEARING THE RECORD OF THOSE WHO HAVE WRONGED ME AND NOT HOLDING A GRUDGE.

DEFINITION OF FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness means responding to offenses so that the power of God's love through me can heal my offenders. It means clearing the record of those who have offended me and choosing to live with any continuing consequences from the offense.

HOW DOES FORGIVENESS RELATE TO PARDON?

If someone kills a member of our family, we are to forgive him. However, we do not have the authority to pardon him. Even with our forgiveness he may suffer the continuing consequences of his offense. Forgiveness is clearing the record of an offender and restoring fellowship. However, the seeds of destruction may continue to have serious consequences.

When David committed adultery with Bathsheba and arranged for the murder of her husband, he repented. Nathan said unto David, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die" (II Samuel 12:13). David's sin was forgiven, but there were further consequences. "Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbor" (II Samuel 12:11).

WHY SHOULD WE SHOW FORGIVENESS?

1. Because God in Christ Jesus has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13).

"Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you" (Colossians 3:13). "Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32). The Greek word for forgive in this passage is *charizomai*. It means "to grant as a favor, to pardon (within appointed jurisdictions), to graciously restore one to another." No religious book except the Bible teaches that God completely forgives sin. The New Testament writers speak of divine forgiveness in two ways. First, divine forgiveness means that God removes the sin barrier to our *relationship* with Him (Acts 26:18; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14). Human sin is an outrageous affront to God's holiness. The God of grace and pardon took the initiative to restore His relationship with His creatures. Only the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God's only son, could remove the penalty for man's sin and sinfulness. Second, divine forgiveness means that God removes the sin barrier to our *fellowship* with Him (1 John 1:9).

2. Because God does not forgive unforgiving people (Matthew 6:12; Mark 11:25-26).

If we are too proud to forgive those who have wronged us, we are too proud to appreciate how we have wronged God. If we do not humble ourselves to extend forgiveness to others, we will not humble ourselves to receive God's forgiveness.

3. Because it avoids the defilement of bitterness.

When we are offended, God gives us the grace to forgive our offenders. Therefore, we are to "follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled" (Hebrews 12:14-15). A lack of forgiveness creates bitterness, and bitterness is like the disease of leprosy. Those who have leprosy lose any sensation of pain; therefore, they are unaware that they are hurting themselves or others. Similarly, those who are bitter are often unaware that they hurt other people with their words, attitudes, and actions.

HOW SHOULD WE SHOW FORGIVENESS?

1. By meditating on how God has forgiven us.

Psalm 130:3-4, “If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared [awestruck with astonishment, overwhelmed].” At the beginning of Luke, chapter 15, the scribes and Pharisees complained concerning the Lord Jesus, “saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.” Christ responded by telling three parables about the joy of an owner finding something precious that he has lost: the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost child. The younger prodigal son, having sinned against his father, having squandered his inheritance, and having been reduced to squalor, was overwhelmed by his father’s love. The older son focused on his “rights” rather than his father’s kindness, and so became angry, bitter and unforgiving. He was not overwhelmed by his father’s love.

The Lord Jesus told another parable about forgiveness in Matthew 18:23-35. A certain king found that one of his servants owed him an astonishingly large debt. After the servant pleaded for more time, the king forgave the balance due. The forgiven servant failed to meditate on the enormous kindness that the King showed him. He turned around and took a fellow servant by the throat and demanded he repay a much smaller debt. In spite of the fellow servant’s pleas for mercy, the forgiven servant refused to forgive. The king found out what the servant had done. Because the first servant failed to appreciate the forgiveness shown to him, the king became very angry. He delivered him to the tormentors until he should pay all that was due unto him.

2. By recognizing the need for repentance before extending forgiveness

(Luke 17:1-3; Matthew 18:15-17). A forgiving spirit is not indulgence that encourages bad behavior (cf. 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15). Nevertheless, the New Testament offers no excuse for holding a grudge. Love is not arrogant, does not seek its own, and does not keep a list of wrongs suffered. At the same time love rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth (1 Corinthians 13:4-6). God emphasizes the concept of pleading for mercy versus pleading for more time. The servant who refused to forgive a small debt after being released from a huge debt was not able to **give** mercy, because he had not **asked** for it. He asked instead for an extension of time: “Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all” (Matthew 18:26). The wise master put him in prison with tormentors to cause him to realize that he could never pay it all back. Only then would he plead for mercy and be able to give it to others.

3. By appropriating God’s grace to grant forgiveness without limit

(Luke 17:3-4; Matthew 18:21-22). Those who have experienced God’s forgiveness have a responsibility to extend forgiveness to others in the way that God has forgiven them (Ephesians 4:32). God forgives every one of His children when they confess their sin (1 John 1:9). The believer must imitate God’s consistency. The story Jesus told in Matthew 18:21-35 was in answer to Peter’s question, “Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.”

Every believer suffers offense and hurt from others, but glory follows suffering. If the suffering God brings to our lives is not recognized as a test from His hand to produce the power of love and God’s glory, Satan will turn it into bitterness. This will bring a lack of forgiveness and destruction. Peter instructs us to follow Christ’s example of forgiveness and doing good to those who hurt us. “Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing” (I Peter 3:9).

4. By seeking reconciliation with those we have wronged

(Matthew 5:23-24). If we know that we have wronged someone, we do not need to wait for the other person to bring up the matter. We should take the initiative to confess our sin (James 5:16). *To confess* means *to say the same thing*. When we confess our sins to God, we say the same thing about our sins that God says about them. That is, we take the same view of our sins that God does. When we confess our sins to someone we have wronged, we need to see our sin from the perspective of the person we have sinned against. This is accomplished by taking the following steps:

- a. Name in particular the thing that we did wrong. Refusing to be specific about our behavior is just an attempt to avoid taking responsibility for our actions.
- b. Acknowledge that what we have done is sin. Rather than just saying we are sorry, we admit that we have done wrong. Do not say, “I apologize **if** I have offended you...” This implies that the wronged person is “overly sensitive,” and is merely another effort to avoid taking responsibility for our actions.
- c. Specifically ask the person we have wronged to forgive us.

HOW FORGIVING ARE YOU?

- Have you made achieving the power of genuine love your goal in life?
- Are there people whom you have not forgiven?
- Does the thought of certain offenders bring pain and hurt to you?
- Do you compare offenses against you to your greater offense to Christ?
- Do you believe that it is your responsibility to punish your offenders?
- Are you fearful that if you forgive an offender, he will not learn from his mistakes?
- Have you looked for ways to return good to those who have offended you?
- Do you see offenses as tests to rejoice and thank God?