

FORGIVENESS¹

Ephesians 4:31-5:2

In this world we need more, not less, forgiveness.

But seeking and granting forgiveness are not well understood and poorly practiced. One Christian counselor teaches that apologizing is the world's substitute for forgiving. He points out that there is not a single reference in the Bible to apologizing. It is an unbiblical concept. It allows the wrongdoer to tell you how he feels ("I'm sorry") without acknowledging his sin and it does not ask the one sinned against to grant forgiveness.

In biblical forgiveness, the wrongdoer admits, "I sinned against you," and asks, "Will you forgive me?" The one wronged must respond by promising, "I forgive you." This is very different than just saying you're sorry or saying to the one who wronged you, "Hey, don't worry about it!"

When we sin against one another, we become indebted to the other person; we owe them justice which can be in the form of punishment or repayment. That is why the Greek words translated *forgive* both focus on the idea of releasing or loosing. Forgiving is the act of releasing or loosing the offender from their debt to us. One of the Greek words translated *forgive* emphasizes that this release is an act of grace. God has shown us indescribable grace by having Jesus pay our sin debt so that we might be forgiven (Colossians 2:13-14).

There is a song I taught the church family many years ago that captures this truth perfectly:

He paid a debt He did not owe
I owed a debt I could not pay
I needed someone to wash my sins away
And now I sing a brand new song
Amazing Grace all day long
Christ Jesus paid a debt that I could never pay

Now, having been graciously forgiven by our heavenly Father, we are to extend forgiveness to those who sin against us (Ephesians 4:31-5:2).

The Apostle Paul says that we are to forgive each other "as God in Christ forgave you." God didn't say, "Hey, don't worry about it, we all make mistakes!" He didn't just brush our sin aside. Rather, our sin renders us truly guilty before God's holy justice. We have violated His holy law. He requires that the penalty be paid. But in love, He sent His own Son to bear the penalty that we deserved. When the guilty sinner acknowledges his sin and lays hold of Christ by faith, God graciously and totally forgives the debt of sin. He releases the sinner from the guilt of his sin. He promises not to remember those sins against him, in the sense of not bringing them up again for judgment. And, He is reconciled to the sinner through the blood of Christ. Considering how God in Christ has forgiven us, we learn how we are to forgive others.

First, forgiveness is the decision to _____ the offender from the guilt of their sin against you. When God forgives us, He brings down the gavel in His courtroom and declares, "Not guilty! Case dismissed."

Second, forgiveness is the decision to never _____ the offense to use against the offender. When God says that He will not remember our sins any more (Heb. 8:12; 10:17), He does not forget

¹ Much in this sermon has been drawn from a study by Steven J. Cole on "Forgiveness".

them in the sense of amnesia. Rather, He means that He will not bring up any of our offenses against us in the future.

Third, to forgive is to make the decision to not dwell on the _____. Thankfully, God is not in heaven rehearsing our forgiven sins every day!

Fourth, to forgive is to make the decision to _____ to others about the offense. If we say that we forgive someone and then tell others about the offense, we are trying to make the offender pay, which is not forgiveness. Or, we're trying to evoke sympathy or admiration from others at the offender's expense. The only exception would be if we fear that the offender may be trying to repeat his sin toward another person, who needs to be warned of the danger.

Fifth, to forgive is to make the decision to be reconciled with the offender to the degree _____ dictates. God forgives us so that we may be reconciled to Him and enjoy a close relationship with Him. When we forgive others, we should also seek to restore the broken relationship. This does not always mean becoming best of friends, but it should at least mean that we are cordial and friendly towards the person.

Even with this knowledge, forgiving is often difficult to do especially if we have been deeply hurt. In our next study, we will think about some additional principles regarding forgiveness in hopes that those truths will help us become those who forgive others as God in Christ has forgiven us.

Grace News and Needs

VOM Needs for January: Washcloths and Monetary Gifts for Action Packs.

2023 Giving Receipts: Look for Bob Davey on the patio in between services.