
Forgiveness Part I

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The Call of Forgiveness

Psalm 32; Matthew 18:21-35

The Call of Forgiveness is just that; it is a direct call from our Lord. It is something extremely special which we are given, and something precious we are to replicate to others. It is not easy. It requires the practice of maturity, the patience to allow the process to unfold, and the tact to endure it. Forgiveness is also a mandate from our Lord. We can take great comfort in knowing that He is working while we are waiting, and even suffering. We can best practice forgiveness by realizing how much we have been forgiven. We can then be imitators of that forgiveness when others willfully or unknowingly cause us setback or harm. The magnitude of forgiveness from our Lord for what we have done can never measure up to anything others could do to us. When we put forgiveness into practice, we will be free from the bondage of bitterness and pain that imprisons us, disconnecting us from life and its wonders, which God has provided for us.

I was watching one of those reality shows recently where a bunch of young people were put into a nice beach house to live and work together. The show is about the drama and strife each one causes the other, and how they “do not” work it out. After all, if they were a big happy family, it would not make good TV, so I am told by a friend in that business. One young woman, in her early twenties, kept making the statement, “I refuse to forgive anyone for anything.” So, in the episode I watched, the attention was centered on how she was alienating everyone in the house. The result was that she ended up alone, hated by the others. She would make a big deal if someone took her cookie, or gave her an objectionable look. She was a very sad and pathetic person, whose self-imposed code of conduct, created out of pride, made it impossible for her to make friends or cooperate with anyone in her life. She could not see that she was the problem; she refused to take any responsibility. In her interviews, she blamed everyone else for her problems. The sad fact is that this is typical behavior amongst many people today, even Christians in the church!

As human beings, we are prone to make mistakes, either intentionally or unintentionally. We all have hurt people, and we have all been hurt; we are all in the same boat. So, when we refuse to forgive one another, it is like escaping the disaster of the sinking of the Titanic in a lifeboat, only to poke holes in the very lifeboat that saved us. Our escape from the sinking ship is our redemption, which we did not deserve. Since everyone else in the lifeboat needs the cross too, why try to sink one another? All you will accomplish is to sink yourself.

Out of mistakes we make, or others cause us, comes our pain, hurt, and resentment. This resentment escalates into animosity, and builds into bitterness, until it destroys relationships and causes us isolation, just as it did with that young woman. She refused to forgive, and built an impenetrable wall that caused bitterness and isolation as she wallowed in her troubles, blaming everyone else for them. She would not allow forgiveness to break down the wall, allowing for the building of life and

relationships. Forgiveness is the only human force that can stop the disintegration of relationships. This is why it is so essential. This is why our Lord calls us to forgive. If you have been hurt, or you have hurt others—and we all have—open your eyes and realize that it is the call of the Christian to dispel these conflicts. Without forgiveness, our growth and maturity with Christ, and our integrity with others, cannot be built.

We may suffer betrayal from friends, family, coworkers, and even church members. However, we are called to forgive, anyway! Why? Because, **we** need it, and because we are imperfect, fallen, and full of sin. Even the Christian who is saved by Grace is still in process of growth and sanctification. We are yet imperfect, no matter what the level of maturity. If you are thinking, *I refuse to forgive others*, just as that young woman did, consider this reason to forgive. *We forgive because God has forgiven us*. If we do not, the resentment will build and build—like battery acid that slowly eats away a car—until, unless we fix it, it will destroy us. Even secular psychologists tell us that resentment is the most powerful, self-destructive emotion in our arsenal. Will you allow forgiveness to build, or bitterness to destroy your relationships and life?

Questions

1. Why do you suppose our Lord calls us to forgive?
2. How would you feel if you were cut off from all of your friends, family, and all networking, business opportunities, and livelihood because someone refused to forgive you?
3. As a Christian a time must come when the reality of who you are in Christ must hit home in power and conviction. Has this happen to you? If so how, if not what would it take?
4. How does forgiveness require our practice of maturity, the patience to allow the process to unfold, and the tact to endure it?
5. What happens when we refuse this process of forgiveness and stay in our pride?
6. How does unforgiveness damage personal relationships and the church?
7. How does the refusal to forgive devalue, demean, and/or distort the Person and Work of Christ? What can you and your church do to be proactive and on guard?
8. How do you feel that Christ is working while you are waiting, and even suffering?
9. How can you best practice forgiveness? How does realizing how much we have been forgiven by Christ help you forgive others?
10. You may suffer betrayal from friends, family, coworkers, and even church members; yet, we are called to forgive, anyway! Why? What are you going to do about this call?