
Forgiveness Part X

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The Biblical Steps in Forgiving

Psalm 32; Matthew 18:21-35

Now that we have discussed the *why* and *what* of forgiveness, we need a practical way to apply it to our lives. Remember, we need to have the Biblical mandates in mind, and be willing to surrender our desires for revenge, and the storage of wrongs for future bitterness.

First: Know what Christ did for you.

In the book of Romans, we read, "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:22-24, NIV)

For us to grasp the idea and call of forgiveness, we must have a deep sense of the price that Christ paid for us. Christ paid the ultimate price for us, and forgave us for acts deemed unpardonable. When we grasp what Christ has done for us, we should be motivated into overdrive, always seeking forgiveness. When we have the proper perspective of Grace, what it cost and what it is, we then should be able to reciprocate to those around us. God forgave us for our failures, so, why not forgive others? This realization must precede any of our efforts to reconcile, because, with the knowledge of *what* and *why* we are forgiving, we will be able to follow the Will of God, and actually forgive with a willing and loving heart. We are not to let our emotions rule us, or to over-react, making the situation worse.

With the understanding of what Christ did for us on behalf of forgiveness, we can put a bigger piece of trust and reliance onto our Lord. We must be able to fully trust, rely on, and surrender the control over to Christ. Thus, our dependence becomes who we are in Christ. When we then take the risk, we need not worry about the results or consequence of that action. We are to lean on and trust in our Lord, allowing His Grace to flow through us to those around us; this is the mark of a healthy Christian.

Second: We must be willing to take the risk.

"Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord." (Romans 12:19, NIV)

"But a witless man can no more become wise than a wild donkey's colt can be born a man. Yet if you devote your heart to him and stretch out your hands to him, if you put away the sin that is in your hand and allow no evil to dwell in your tent, then you will lift up your face without shame; you will stand firm and without fear." (Job 11:12-15, NIV)

Forgiveness is a risky business. The person who we choose to forgive may not realize, or admit to the wrong. Nor, will they always accept our forgiveness. But, their response is not our responsibility; we are only to be obedient to our Lord, and give the forgiveness out of love, not expecting a warm response. That Elder who refused to forgive me for a perceived wrong I did to him is responsible for his actions to the Lord, I am not. I am responsible for my response. So, I sought the forgiveness, and he refused. That is a risk we all have to take. Also, the person who we forgive may continue in the offense, such as that Elder who kept spreading rumors about me. He refused to stop; but, again, this is not my responsibility. We are to allow others the freedom to disappoint us and to fail our expectations.

“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter. So even though I wrote to you, it was not on account of the one who did the wrong or of the injured party, but rather that before God you could see for yourselves how devoted to us you are. By all this we are encouraged.” (2 Corinthians 7:10-13a, NIV)

We need to be willing to put aside the concern that forgiveness will minimize the wrong brought against us. Sin is ugly. We should recognize that fact as well as the fact of its corrupting nature. But, just forgiving someone does not make the sin go away. Forgiveness releases the guilt, and stops the cycle of bitterness and dysfunction.

Third: We need to cancel the betrayal.

“Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs.” (Proverbs 10:12, NIV)

“He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.” (Proverbs 17:9 NIV)

We have to give up our perceived right of revenge and retaliation. This can be a tough process, but one that we can accomplish through prayer, and self-surrender. Try to look at it this way; the offense against you is actually an offense against God. As God’s child, you are in His protection and care. When someone offends you, it also becomes an offense against God Himself. Thus, we are to surrender our rights to His, and cancel the debt—completely out of existence, and, out of our heart and mind. Give it over as if it never happened. You will be surprised that once you do this, you will feel the load lifted off you and you can rest in the comfort of the Lord.

When you pray to God, you need to be actually requesting that He would take the desire of revenge away, then relinquish your desires of revenge!

Fourth: We need to offer personal forgiveness.

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Romans 12:2, NIV)

We must be willing to go to the person who offended us, and, both verbally and non-verbally, forgive them. Then, seek an appropriate reconciliation to that individual. Offer the love and acceptance to the *person*, not necessarily to *what they did*. God

desires that we be involved in growing positive and healthy relationships, the primary purpose of our existence is relationships, relationships with God to us and then us to others. In relationships we can model, grow in, make known and glorify our Lord. This should be a driving force of who we are as Christians, saved by Grace. It is the responsibility of the person who did the wrong to repent—not the person offended. You cannot force repentance from someone; you can only pray for him or her, and offer the forgiveness. The relationship can only positively continue when repentance and forgiveness are pursued.

If the offender refuses to repent, or refuses to accept the forgiveness, then this means their nature is in denial. They feel no wrong was committed, or see you as trying to manipulate their Will. They may be a *sociopath*, that is, have some form of mental disorder where they may enjoy inflicting hurt and hardship on people. In any case, the reason is not your responsibility, nor are you responsible for their acceptance. Your responsibility is only to genuinely offer forgiveness. We need to accept the fact of human nature; some people just will not *play ball* God's way, especially Christians. So, if this is the case with your forgiveness, then it still remains between you and Christ, as it is anyway, because we are God's children.

“The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear-minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.” (1 Peter 4:7-8 NIV)

Fifth: We need to recognize the picture of Forgiveness.

The result of forgiveness is letting go of the offense, and, wishing blessings and compassion to the person who wronged you. Repentance simply means, Biblically, to change one's perspective. In other words, you turn—from your way of thinking to God's way. That is, we change our minds and hearts—from our desires to Christ's desires. When we do this, then we have truly forgiven that person. Leaving out any of the above steps, and only forcing your Will into the situation, means you are deluding yourself into thinking that you have forgiven; you have not. It is not about us, it is about God, and His desire for us is to live in peace and love.

We always need to keep reminding ourselves of our status in Christ, as we previously discussed, because this is paramount to continuing to go on in our lives without the hurt and bitterness. “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8, NIV) This does not mean that we will not feel the pain, or perhaps suffer consequences from someone else's actions. What it means is, we are saved by Grace, by what Christ has done. So, we need to reciprocate grace and peace to those around us, even though we may not want to.

“This is what the LORD says: ‘Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,’ declares the LORD.” (Jeremiah 9:23-24, NIV)

We need to keep ourselves tuned into God constantly and continually, and allow Him to carry us through.

Questions

1. How is forgiveness is a risky business? Is it worth the risk? What would be a worse case scenario? How does Christ help us through it?
2. Carefully and in prayer look over these steps to forgive someone. How can these be a help to improve your relationships?
3. What are you going to do about to heal a broken relationship, a friend, spouse, child, coworker or?
4. Who and why do you have a grudge against? What are you going to do about it? How will these steps be of help?
5. How can forgiveness be used in a practical way and to apply it to your life?
6. Why does God not want us to be controlled by the past or to be fearful or cowardly? How can you have a better mindset to learn and grow from your experiences?
7. How does knowing what Christ has done for us motivate you to always be seeking forgiveness?
8. What can you do to be willing to put aside the concern that forgiveness will minimize the wrong brought against you?
9. What gets in your way to be willing to go to the person who offended you, and, both verbally and non-verbally, forgive them? Why is this s hard?
10. What can you do to see Christ and be tuned into Him constantly and continually, and allow Him to carry you through this difficulty?