

Forgiveness: A Unifying Solution

Ephesians 4: 31, 32

*Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: ³² And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, **forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.**¹*

There are several things that war against unity in the world and in the church of Jesus Christ. One that spans both sectors is unforgiveness. The Apostle Paul addressed the need for unity in the body of Christ as he wrote to the church at Ephesus. In the fourth chapter of Ephesians, the Apostle Paul makes it clear that our behavior towards each other as Christians can bring us closer together or create space, division and separation.

Unfortunately, many relationships have been strained, damaged or destroyed by the absence of forgiveness. That is why forgiveness is vital in unifying us as believers and followers of Jesus Christ. Ephesians is not the first time the Holy Spirit spoke on forgiveness. Matthew 6:12 and Colossians 3:13 admonish forgiveness also.

Let us examine forgiveness as a unifying solution:

Forgiveness is Neither a Feeling, nor Forgetting, nor Excusing

Forgiveness is not a feeling. It is an act of the will. We must ask God to help change our hearts. Forgiveness is not forgetting. Forgiving is an active process which involves a conscious choice and a deliberate course of action. In Isaiah 43:25 God is not saying that He cannot remember our sins. He promises that He will not remember them. We must rely on God's grace and consciously decide not to think or talk about what others have done to hurt us. Lastly, forgiveness is not excusing someone from their wrong actions. Genuine forgiveness says we both know you were wrong and without excuse. But since God has forgiven me, I forgive you.

Forgiveness Is a Decision

To forgive someone means to sincerely release them from liability to suffer punishment or penalty. Matthew chapter 18: 21-35 contains a clear and powerful parable presented by Jesus regarding the forgiveness and the need to let a person go or release them from their wrong doing. In Luke 4: 42, 43 forgiveness is defined as undeserved and cannot be earned.

If someone sinned against us, part of their debt is also owed to us. This gives us a choice to either **take** or **make** payments on the debt owed. One takes the payment by withholding true forgiveness, by dwelling on the wrong, by being cold and aloof, by

¹ *The Holy Bible: King James Version.* electronic ed. of the 1769 edition of the 1611

totally giving up on the relationship by gossiping or being silent which actually inflicts emotional pain.

Our other choice is to make the payment by releasing them from penalties they actually deserve to pay. Sometimes this is easier to do than others; especially when there is deep seeded pain. We must always rely on the grace of God extended to us through the shed blood of Jesus in order to forgive others.

Here are four personal promises that will help describe forgiveness as a decision we have to make:

1. "I will not dwell on this incident".
2. "I will not bring up this incident again and use it against you".
3. "I will not talk to others about this incident".
4. "I will not let this incident stand between us or hinder our personal relationships".

When Should You Forgive?

Repentance should always precede forgiveness as referenced in Luke 17:3, 4. However, when an offense is too serious to overlook and repentance by the offender has not taken place, forgiveness **may** need two stages. First we need an attitude of forgiveness and secondly granting the forgiveness. Having the proper attitude about forgiveness as described in Luke 6:28, protects us from bitterness and resentment in case our offender takes a long time to repent. Granting forgiveness is conditional on the repentance of the offender and should take place between you and the offender. But sometimes we must seek the involvement of others in bringing resolution to the matter (Matthew 18:16-20). These two stages are seen in the life of Christ in Luke 23:34 and Acts 2: 36-41.

Recommended Resources: The Gift of Forgiveness; Charles Stanley; The Peace Maker; Ken Sande.