



Forgiving One Another Even As God

January 4, 2016 Forgiveness

Ephesians 4:29-32 (KJV)

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. 30 And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, **EVEN AS GOD FOR CHRIST'S SAKE HATH FORGIVEN YOU.** [emphasis mine]

Wrong teaching and following the will of the flesh, the will of the mind, and the wisdom of this world have brought much confusion to many regarding the subject of forgiving one another. I want to shed light on this subject and bring freedom to many. However, in part one, I want to examine what true biblical forgiveness is. Forgiveness should and must be defined by the author of forgiveness himself—God! That definition is found in God's Word and has nothing to do with what you or I think or feel about it. In verse 32 from the above passage of scripture, we are commanded by God to forgive one another "EVEN AS GOD." It is not a suggestion. If we are going to forgive "EVEN AS GOD," we must first know how God forgives.

First of all, we need to know what the word forgive means. According to Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible by Dr. Robert Young, there are several words, both in Hebrew and in Greek, that are translated forgive. They are as follows: to cover; to lift up or away; to send away; and to be gracious. Therefore, it is not possible to forgive someone and continue to treat them as though their sin has not been covered, lifted up or away, sent away, let go, loosed away, let off, etc. If you claim to have forgiven someone, you must treat him or her

the same as if they had never sinned against you! According to Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, "Human forgiveness is to be strictly analogous to Divine forgiveness, e.g., Matthew 6:12, if certain conditions are fulfilled there is no limitation to Christ's law of forgiveness, ...the conditions are repentance and confession."

Now let's examine God's forgiveness from the scriptures.

Isaiah 43:25-26 (NKJV)

I, even I, am He who BLOTS OUT your transgressions for my own sake; and will NOT remember your sins. Put me in remembrance; let us contend together; state your case, that you may be ACQUITTED. [Emphasis mine]

1 John 1:9 (NKJV)

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to FORGIVE us our sins and to CLEANSE us from all unrighteousness. [Emphasis mine]

When God forgives, our sins are washed away. When we truly forgive one another, the sins are washed away.

John 3:16-17 (NKJV)

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whoever believes in Him should NOT PERISH but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to CONDEMN the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. [Emphasis mine]

The motivating force behind God's forgiveness is His love for us. At its root, unforgiveness is refusal to walk in love. True BIBLICAL FORGIVENESS is the God-kind of forgiveness.

One problem that believers have in the area of forgiveness is trying to forgive according to the wisdom of this world. The world's wisdom says, "I forgive you, but I'll never forget what you've done," or perhaps, "I'm not God. Therefore, I can't forgive you like He can. It's going to take me a while to get over this!" The wisdom of this world also says things such as, "I'm sorry, but we all have our limitations, don't we?" Beloved, this wisdom is not godly, but earthly, sensual, and devilish. (James 3:15).

James 3:17 (NKJV)

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then PEACEABLE, gentle, willing to yield, FULL OF MERCY and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. [Emphasis mine]

Similarly, some believers, through following the will of the flesh and of the mind, are lured into a false forgiveness. They have deceived themselves to believe that they have forgiven—usually based on how they feel. If your forgiveness is any different from God's forgiveness, it is a false forgiveness. Remember that we are to forgive one another "EVEN AS GOD." True forgiveness is not based on how we feel because, as you well know, feelings change. You can feel so warm and loving towards someone, until it seems like you can eat them. However, not long after, when they hurt you or anger you, your feelings change, and you begin to wish that you had eaten them! Don't trust your emotions, but rather trust God's

Word. Forgiving is done by faith, not feelings.

Here is another area of difficulty caused by wrong teaching on the subject of forgiveness, and believe me, there's plenty of it going around. For instance, there are some who believe and teach that they can completely wash their hands of an individual by refusing to talk to, be in the presence of, or have anything to do with them, and at the same time walk in love and forgiveness towards them. Does God forgive that way? Imagine for a moment that you sinned against God but then repented and sought forgiveness. God declares that you are forgiven, but He does not want to have anything to do with you, nor be in your presence, or have anything to say to you. In such a case, the forgiveness would be fruitless, wouldn't you say? That is totally out of character for God and should also be out of character for you and me. Remember, forgive one another "EVEN AS GOD"!

There are times when withdrawing fellowship from other believers is both right and necessary, but as we shall see, it is only when they are in sin. To withhold fellowship from people who have repented is blatant unforgiveness. In fact, you actually become one in need of repentance. Let's examine closely some scriptures dealing with this very thing.

2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 (NKJV)

But we command you brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you WITHDRAW from every BROTHER who WALKS disorderly and NOT according to the tradition which he received of us. [Emphasis mine]

Let's pause here and notice that they were instructed to WITHDRAW from every brother who WALKS or is PRESENTLY WALKING disorderly and not according to the tradition; which means that they were NOT at the time. He was not talking about brothers who didn't walk according to the tradition in the past, but about those who were presently walking disorderly. Let's continue with verse 11:

2 Thessalonians 3:11 (NKJV)

For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, NOT WORKING at all, but ARE busybodies. [Emphasis mine]

Notice again that it is a PRESENT reality. Now what could these nonworking busybodies do to avoid having the fellowship of others withdrawn? Verse 12 gives the answer.

2 Thessalonians 3:12 (NKJV)

Now those who ARE (present tense) such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they WORK in quietness and eat their own bread. [Emphasis mine]

We need to realize that Paul's purpose behind the commandment was to bring the offender to repentance through personal shame. Once that was accomplished, there remained no more sin and, consequently, no more need to withdraw. Let's pick up in verse 14.

2 Thessalonians 3:14 (NKJV)

And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep

company with him, THAT HE MAY BE ASHAMED. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. [Emphasis mine]

Did you get that? If he doesn't obey, withdraw from him, but don't consider him your enemy! When you say things such as, "That dog is no brother of mine," or "If I never see them again, it will be too soon," or "Don't even bring that person's name up in my presence," etc., this is a sure sign that you are dealing with unforgiveness. Another sign that you have not forgiven is when you continue to talk about the offense committed against you. If people are honest with themselves, they'll admit that the reason they keep talking about offenses committed against them is to somehow get back at the offender. In other words, they're trying to get mileage out of it. Jesus commanded us to go to the offender and tell him his fault (offense) between him and us alone.

Matthew 18:15 (NKJV)

Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and TELL HIM his fault between YOU and HIM ALONE. If he hears you, you have GAINED your brother. [Emphasis mine]

What does Jesus mean when he says, "If he hears you?" In other words, if he acknowledges what you are saying and repents, then you would have gained your brother, and peace and fellowship is restored. At this point, it would be totally UNNECESSARY and WRONG to go to others and talk about the offense. This is GOD'S WAY of keeping Satan from causing confusion and destroying relationships. On the other hand, if the offender refuses to get right with you and acknowledge their sin, then and only then are you instructed to involve another person.

Matthew 18:16 (NKJV)

But if he will not hear, TAKE WITH YOU (not tell one or two others privately) one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three WITNESSES every word may be established. [Emphasis mine]

Finally, as the last resort, we are to take it to the church as a last attempt to bring the offender to repentance before writing them off as a sinner:

Matthew 18:17 (NKJV)

And if he REFUSES to HEAR THEM (notice that he refuses to HEAR THEM, implying that they tried to persuade him to repent) tell it to the church: But if he refuses even to hear the church, (again, HEAR THE CHURCH implies that the CHURCH tried to persuade him to repent) let him be to you like a heathen (sinner) and a tax collector. [Emphasis mine]

How many relationships have been destroyed by people refusing to obey this royal law of love? Only God knows the answer for sure, but it's a serious indictment against the Church. There are some devastating effects suffered by many through disobedience of this simple law of love!

When you are faced with the temptation of "telling the facts" about others or even spreading things that you've heard, perhaps the following rules should be considered before

proceeding:

Rule #1

Is What You're Reporting True?

Notice that the question is not, "do you believe that what you're reporting is true?" It is imperative that you know the information you're passing on to others is true, because you will be held accountable before God for its effect on others. (Romans 14:12-13)

Rule #2

Is It Necessary?

As we have already seen, when it comes to forgiving an offender, once the sin has been acknowledged and repented of, it's not necessary or even right to pass it on to others. It is dangerous to pass on things you've heard.

Rule #3

Is Your Motive Pure?

Some real soul searching may be necessary at this point. You should only be attempting to bring the offender to repentance so that there may be peace and reconciliation. (Matthew 18:15-17)

Rule #4

Does It Benefit The Hearer?

Some people say, "I'm only trying to help others so that they won't be hurt also by this wicked person. That's the only reason for my passing this information on. After all, I am my brother's keeper." Beloved, don't get duped by the enemy! This is a bogus attempt to hide your real motive and to give yourself a license to spread gossip.

You need to realize that God cannot be fooled. He is watching and listening! Also, remember our text (Ephesians 4:29-32) and particularly verse 29 when considering the four rules discussed. If the answer to any of them is no, keep your mouth closed, and live in peace. (1 Peter 3:10-12; James 1:26)

Finally, there are some that use trust as a means to hide their unforgiveness. They may say things like, "I forgive them, but I just don't trust them anymore," or "I forgive them, but I will never trust them again." I think that we really need to be careful in this area, lest we walk in unforgiveness unaware!

I want to share some thoughts that I believe are inspired by the Holy Spirit. Once a person has truly repented of his or her sin or offence, turning wholeheartedly unto God, there's no longer a reason to distrust. However, an apology alone may not necessarily be a sign that one has truly repented. Whenever possible, necessary steps should be taken by the offender to make restitution, e.g., money stolen or property destroyed should be replaced and repaired. This may be necessary for trust to be restored by the party offended. The party offended in such a case has the right to determine what steps are necessary by the offender to earn their trust. Yet, it should be within reason and not something unrealistic or impossible. For example, a husband may have wronged his wife with another woman. After

being confronted with his sin, the husband acknowledges his sin and asks for forgiveness. The wife agrees to forgive him, but in order to trust him again, she may require him to be home by a certain hour or call home at certain times whereby she can verify his whereabouts. This is not unreasonable. The offender should be willing to show signs of his repentant heart. True repentance begins with:

- an acknowledgement of the offense;
- a heartfelt request for forgiveness; and
- a quality decision to turn from that sin.

You may withhold trust until such steps have been taken, but you cannot have an unwillingness to trust in spite of steps taken by the offender. Also, you cannot withhold forgiveness until you feel comfortable trusting the individual. It may take some time to be convinced that you can trust the offender or ex-offender, but if you're unwilling to trust no matter what, you will never be able to trust them, and unforgiveness is a present reality! Not trusting is one thing, but not being willing to trust is another thing altogether!

Maranatha