

Learning to Forgive

It has been a question for years. How do I truly forgive someone who has done me wrong? How can I just let it go without any recompense for the hurt that they did to me?

This is a problem that many will have to face during their lifetime, and they will have to deal with it if they are going to be able to move on and find peace.

When counselling or giving a sermon about forgiveness, I have had people tell me that I do not understand or that I have never experienced what they are going through. My answer to them is to reassure them that I have been cheated by many, been stabbed in the back by friends who I loved dearly and have been lied to by people I trusted. So, how do we get past these happenings?

Well, for years, I walked around disappointed, angry and continued harboring bitterness toward the people that had hurt me. I do not know if the other people felt bad, but I was miserable. They did not seem to care what they had done, but I did. If they did not care, then why should I be concerned about forgiving them? I needed help to know what to do, so I turned to the bible to see what Jesus had to say about forgiving. In the following, Peter wants to know how often he should forgive:

Matthew 18:21-22— “Then Peter came to Him and said, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’ ” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.”

Although Peter refers only to a brother, this question would also pertain to a sister too. Peter thought he was being very considerate by suggesting that forgiveness should be given at least seven times.

Jesus corrected him by saying that he should forgive 490 times. Why this number? It is so high that the average person would not try to keep count of how many times they had forgiven someone. In this instance there is no mention of the person asking for forgiveness, which is very important for us to pay attention to.

Jesus speaks a parable about forgiveness:

Matthew 18:23-25— Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made.

The kingdom spoken of here is all of mankind. We are all born under sin and remain sold to sin until God draws us to His Son and offers us redemption. We owe this great debt and have no way to repay it on our own!

Matthew 18:26-27— The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, “Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.” Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.

When we repent of our sins, because God loves us, He has offered His Son to pay our debt so that forgiveness can come and we can have a relationship with Him.

Matthew 18:28-35— “But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’ So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt.”

“So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’ And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”

This person after receiving the Lord's forgiveness, chose not to forgive the one who had trespassed against him. Because of this, the forgiveness the Lord, was removed and he was turned over to the tormentors.

Matthew 18:35— "So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."

When we choose not to forgive, then God cannot forgive us, and we dwell in the torment of bitterness until we repent and forgive. When we do not forgive, we are breaking the two greatest commandments. We are disobeying God and we are not loving our neighbor

In the outline for prayer that Jesus spoke of, He stressed again the importance of forgiveness.

Matthew 6:12-15— And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

We are going to be hurt, offended and taken advantage of if we walk in the way of Christ. When we have love for others, some will take advantage of that love, some will disappoint us, and some will even turn against us. Even in the worst moments of our lives, during the hurt and the pain, we still need to show the same love and forgiveness that God has shown us.

Luke 6:27-31— But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.

Jesus wanted people to love Him and to love the Father, so He showed them love, mercy and compassion. Throughout His ministry people said terrible things about Him. He was physically abused after His arrest. He was shamed in front of the people, but He still loved and died for them and us. Even on the cross, He asked the Father to forgive.

Luke 23:34-35— And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, Father, *forgive them; for they know not what they do.* And they parted his raiment, and cast lots. And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God.

Jesus understood why the people did what they did to Him. They were under the influence of the spirit of antichrist. That is why He said that they did not know what they were doing.

Stephen, when he was being stoned, knew the same thing, so he asked God to forgive them too. It is not our place to seek revenge. It is not our place to hate, even through our thoughts.

God will punish those who hurt His children. Unless they repent, they will face God's wrath.

Luke 17:1-4— Then He said to the disciples, "It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him."

God is the Great Judge. He will judge all matters and situations. We just need to obey Him and forgive as He commands us to.

We are to show the fruit of the Spirit, which are the fruits meet for repentance that John, the Baptist and Paul both spoke about.

Matthew 3:7-8— "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore *bear fruits worthy of repentance: . . .*"

Acts 26:20— ". . . but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and *do works befitting repentance.*"

Galatians 5:22-23— But *the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.* Against such there is no law.

Ephesians 5:9-10— (for the fruit of the spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.

We must show these fruits to everyone around us. How can we do this if we are harboring bitterness and unforgiveness towards anyone?

Many brethren are still angry about things that happened to them in the past, whether it be because of brethren, a minister or the church.

No matter what has happened to us in the past, we cannot change that. Put it in the hands of God. Take the wrong that has happened and let it go. I personally have found great peace by doing this.

1 Corinthians 6:7-8— But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers! Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren!

I have learned from my own past experiences that humans have flaws and organizations are not perfect, but God can be trusted in all things. I realized that I had to take a lot of the blame for things that happened to me. I made the mistake of putting my trust in a person instead of heeding the warnings in the bible. We need to put our trust where it belongs and leave it there.

Psalms 4:5— Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the LORD.

Psalms 40:4— Blessed is that man who makes the LORD his trust, and does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.

Consider this: that whatever happened to you may have been done for your own good. Maybe it started you on a different or even better

path or maybe it strengthened your faith. Take time to think about what happened to Joseph. He was angry for a while until he realized the reason for everything that had happened.

Genesis 50:17-20— Thus you shall say to Joseph: "I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you. Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, "Behold, we are your servants." Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God. But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."

Forgiveness is for our benefit. The other person may not forgive you or even accept any apology or kindness you offer, but that is on them. God sees what you do, and He knows your heart. Forgiveness will not only bring peace, but it will bring about healing, mentally, spiritually and in many cases physically.

If we want God to hear our prayers, then we need to get rid of any anger or bitterness we harbor. If we want Him to forgive us of our sins, then we are required to forgive others.

Mark 11:24-26— "Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them. And *whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.*"

Let us all walk with the Lord in love, mercy, compassion and forgiveness.

—Stephen Hicks