

Changing the Course of Future History

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Scripture: Colossians 3:10-15 (CEV)

“10 Each of you is now a new person. You are becoming more and more like your Creator, and you will understand him better.

11 It doesn't matter if you are a Greek or a Jew, or if you are circumcised or not. You may even be a barbarian or a Scythian, and you may be a slave or a free person. Yet Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us.

12 God loves you and has chosen you as his own special people. So be gentle, kind, humble, meek, and patient.

13 Put up with each other, and forgive anyone who does you wrong, just as Christ has forgiven you.

14 Love is more important than anything else. It is what ties everything completely together.

15 Each one of you is part of the body of Christ, and you were chosen to live together in peace. So let the peace that comes from Christ control your thoughts. And be grateful.”

Introduction

Family in Christ, it is time that we sat down and had a heart-to-heart conversation about forgiveness. There is simply too much hurt, sadness and strained relationships...we cannot any longer, remain silent.

When you forgive someone, who stands to gain the most? You, God or the offender? Just how do you forgive someone when you are in tremendous pain? Who all needs to be forgiven and for what? Is forgiveness a feeling or emotion?

Emotional pain hurts more than physical pain because unprocessed emotional pain can keep on returning; physical pain, however, usually fades into a distant memory.

Clearly, for any reasonable person, something must be done about the emotional pain.

Only the Strong Forgive

When you forgive, you have to give something up. There is a price to pay. You have to let go of any resentment, anger and other negative feelings. It means that you deliberately and choose not to “get even.” Forgiveness does not mean that you overlook or deny either the offence or the offender. It means that you are willing to work toward clearing a pathway dotted with obstacles, to set yourself free and hopefully achieve Godly reconciliation.

Forgiveness is a hard thing to do when you are serious about it. The cross is a powerful reminder of the seriousness and extent of God’s forgiveness, “When he had received the drink, Jesus said, ‘It is finished.’ With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit” (John 19:30). When Jesus said, “It is finished” he is saying, “your sin is paid in full” as described in Psalm 103:12, “...as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”

Paul, in Romans 8:1, wrote, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” If there is no condemnation, then something must have happened to release us from the charges and penalties resulting from our sins. In Colossians 1:14, Paul in writing about Jesus clarifies, “... in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

Forgiven by Christ means that our sins, immoralities and wrongdoings are wiped off of our record by Christ who took the punishment we deserved. Did Jesus feel like dying on the cross? Or was it just something that had to be done?

Specifically, to whose benefit was the cross ... yours or God’s? God’s benefit and you reap benefits through reconciliation with God, by God. We love God because He first loved us. He chose us, we did not choose Him. Before this world was made, He had already chosen you—in love—to be holy and without blame, through Jesus. God reconciled us to Him.

With this in mind, we have to make an important decision about those who wronged us, and it is not always as simple as saying “I forgive you.” What are you going to do about the consequences of the other party’s wrongdoing and your role in the incident?

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Let’s reframe things. Do you want to carry with you into your future, some powerful negative emotions? Or do you instead desire peace and growth flowing forth out of the incident? The

incident cannot be undone ... what do you desire moving forward?

Do you want healing in your relationship with God, in yourself and with the offender?

Actually, you are standing at a three-pronged fork: (1) to “forgive and forget” or (2) “not to forgive and be reminded of the pain” or (3) “forgive and choose not to dwell over the damages?”

1. To “forgive and forget” is impossible unless you can delete your memories and everything that may remind you of someone.
2. To “not to forgive and be reminded of the pain” leads you into a future with balls and chains around both ankles.
3. “Forgive and choose not to dwell over the damages” is the best outcome for God, the offender and yourself.

Essentially, we can reduce your choices to, move on or stay put. Ask yourself, which option will be beneficial to my relationship with God, myself and the offender?

Forgiveness is not a feeling. Forgiveness is a decision that you make, despite your feelings. Your decision and feelings might not, at first, be in alignment with one another, but they will get there with some time and (possibly) help.

Feelings change from day to day, but your decision stands solid.

The Fuller Picture

When we speak of forgiveness, we are saying to each other, “someone did something to another someone which resulted in losses and consequences.” Here is the thing: without identifying the someone’s and something’s then you probably do not have the fuller picture about who it is that you are forgiving and for what. For this reason, many people never get to the point of actually forgiving in all of its completeness.

When Jesus spoke of “forgiveness,” 45 times he used the Greek word (**afimi**) “*aphiemi*.” “*Aphiemi*” is a combination of from “*apo*,” meaning “from” and “*hiemi*,” meaning “to send.” Can you imagine prayerfully telling God that you “from to send” someone when praying about forgiveness? “From to send” is a direct translation. In meaning, when Jesus used “*aphiem*,” it has the direct connotation of releasing something closely held or trapped. In understanding this,

we say to each other that when we forgiveness it is both painful and it involves a deep separation. This is what letting go is. You cannot achieve a new position of healing and restoration without moving “from to send.” The act of forgiveness now takes on a fuller meaning when we apply “*aphiemi*.”

You might, at this stage, be asking two questions: (1) “What if I am not ready to forgive” and (2) “How do I forgive?”

If you choose not to forgive, that too is a decision and it says, “I am willing to step into a future with balls and chains around both my ankles.” As we previously said, there is a price to pay when choosing to forgive and choosing not to forgive. Know this, forgiveness has no t’s & c’s. Unforgiveness does have t’s and c’s. It’s your call.

Debriefing

I assume that you choose to forgive. I believe that it is the biblical thing to do. What about you? What about your role in all of this? Maybe you have a role, maybe you don’t. But sometimes we cannot stand entirely innocent, and we need to make right with those we have offended, and we need to make right with self.

Perhaps we can also ask of ourselves, “what could I have done differently?” And this brings me to 3 more questions:

- In what ways is your relationship with God likely to improve if you walk the road of forgiveness?
- In what ways is your relationship with the offender likely to improve if you walk the road of forgiveness?
- In what ways is your relationship with yourself likely to improve if you walk the road of forgiveness?

Prayer

Lord, help me to forgive the offender and myself. I pray that you forgive through me because in my own strength I cannot completely forgive. I need You to help me. I want to do Your will and I want to obey Your command to forgive.

Lord, I forgive _____ for _____

I unconditionally release _____ from further blame.

Amen.

Points to Ponder (Conclusion)

Think carefully before going to someone and tell them “I forgive you.” You might just be accusing them of wrongdoing—something that they may or may not even be aware of.

Forgiveness does not equal reconciliation with the offender. Forgiveness is commanded in the Bible (e.g., Colossians 3:13-14); reconciliation is advised. Reconciliation is a goal of forgiveness (e.g., Romans 12:18).

You do not need to forgive someone for God to forgive you. If this were true, then it means that the Gospel comes to us with t’s and c’s, which it doesn’t. We are part of the New Covenant and Christ initiated a new way for God to relate to us. We are the products of God’s love, grace and mercy. Forgive as Christ forgave you (e.g., Ephesians 4:32). As Christ forgave you, forgive others...unconditionally. Let the love and grace of God triumph!

Let’s quickly recap on the law of Christ, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” The second is this: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no commandment greater than these’ (Mark 12:30-31).

Amen