

Forgiveness

In marriage, and all relationships for that matter, forgiveness must be a constant attitude of the heart. Failure to forgive will result in bitterness and strife which most relationships cannot withstand. Unforgiveness is a sin and it only grows worse with time; ruining marriages, friendships and affecting our fellowship with God. It is not that we only forgive in order to be forgiven, but we do need to recognize that Jesus said, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6:14– 15).

Refusal to forgive "...causes trouble, and by this many become defiled" (Heb. 12:15). When we withhold forgiveness toward someone else, it breaks our fellowship with God and thereby grieves the Holy Spirit. The result is bitterness, which is a condition that grows worse with time, ruins relationships and defiles the person along with those around them. This refusal to forgive clearly shows that we've forgotten our own need for forgiveness; both from God and from others. We forget how sinful we ourselves are and what we are apart from God's forgiveness. Let's face it, we want God to forgive us, but are not so quick to offer the same forgiveness to others.

We have been forgiven all of our sin, past, present and future, on the basis of God's grace, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We can't earn His forgiveness and we certainly don't merit His grace. It is because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross – and that alone - that we can be forgiven. And we who have been forgiven for so much, are never justified in withholding forgiveness from another. Hence the admonition from Paul the apostle, "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you." (Eph. 4:32)

Relationships cannot endure the walls that this sin puts up. Jesus said it was this hardness of heart that causes divorce (Mark 10:2-9), for the best of relationships are easily made worse by sin. Sin is the great destructive force in the universe that not only caused the ruin of man, but required God to send His Son as the ONLY remedy for sin, providing man's salvation. Forgiveness is more powerful than the sin that requires us to exercise it. Forgiveness can create relationships where there is none and mend hurts when it seems there is no remedy.

For man to sin is natural, for him to forgive is supernatural and that power comes from God. It's from God that we take our queues when it comes to extending grace, mercy, love and forgiveness. It is His nature to love, which is the motivation behind the cross. The cross then justifies God in extending forgiveness to man. Since Jesus paid the penalty for our sin, God is now just and free to offer forgiveness without violating His righteousness, because the payment was made in full for man.

As you answer the following questions, remember that it is not just the correct answers that are being sought after, but walking in obedience to God's Word. It is a tragedy when forgiveness is merely academics and lacks daily application. The Greek word for forgiveness comes from the

Greek word for freedom. Interestingly, when we free others from what they have done in offense toward us, we intern free ourselves from the bondage of bitterness and defilement.

Too many people have been afflicted with physical ailments because of the bitterness of the soul. As with the root cause of many physical ailments, unforgiveness can manifest itself in physical ways. The better choice is to obey the Great Physician and forgive; this will keep us and our relationships healthy.

To have proper communication and relationship, forgiveness needs to be a constant attitude of the heart, or bitterness will result. The sin of unforgiveness and bitterness will destroy the relationship with people, and put on hold the relationship with God. Relationships cannot endure the walls that this sin puts up. Jesus said it was this hardness of heart that causes divorce (Mark 10:2-9), for the best of relationships are easily made worst by sin. Therefore, ask God to search your own heart (Psalm 139:23-24) as you answer the following important questions.

1. READ MATTHEW 18:21-35. Explain in your own words what you think Jesus is telling Peter. (Try and reduce your thoughts to a few sentences):

2. READ LUKE 17:1-6. Explain this in your own words as above. (In your answer, also include WHY you think Jesus said, "Take heed to yourselves." (v3).

3. READ EPHESIANS 4:17-5:2. This will give you the context, and then explain how forgiveness would apply to verses 29-32: **4. READ 1 CORINTHIANS 10:13.** Forgiveness like love is exercised by faith and not by feelings. We are tempted to withhold forgiveness at times when we are hurt.

Do you find this difficulty in your relationship with your spouse?: If so, who and why?

Why is it wrong to ever hold unforgiveness in our hearts toward another person?