



Light from the Word

Forgive One Another

Editor's Note: The Bible uses the term "one another" multiple times and it is clear God is very interested in our relationships. Jesus taught that the second greatest commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves. In 2018, we will look at several of the "one anothers" in the Bible.

Theme verse: *"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."*

To forgive means to pardon or cancel an offense and to treat the offender as not guilty. It can also be viewed as a release of our resentment towards them. Forgiveness is one of the noblest virtues of a true Christian. It requires some level of self-sacrifice on our part as well as sincere love for our neighbor, fulfilling Christ's second commandment. Clearly, forgiveness is needed to follow Christ's commands given in His sermon on the mount. *"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."*

Pardoning someone's offense does not mean we condone what they have done, nor does it directly alter their status of being forgiven by God. However, if we choose to withhold forgiveness we hurt ourselves far more than we hurt the other person. Christ makes it abundantly clear in his discourse on prayer that if we desire forgiveness from our Heavenly Father, we must first be willing to forgive others. *"For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."* Peter boldly suggested that forgiving

someone seven times should be quite enough for human endurance, which prompted Jesus' solemn reply, *"I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven."* In other words, our attitude of mercy and forbearance towards one another must be unlimited if we desire the same treatment from our Heavenly Father.

We could easily have the thought, "I will forgive them, but they need to apologize to me first." This is not scriptural as evidenced by two noteworthy examples in the New Testament. First, Christ forgave those who were mistreating and torturing Him during the crucifixion, *"Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots."* He knew they did not realize the magnitude of what they were doing, and His love for them was so great that He did not hold his oppressors accountable for their act. Second, Stephen forgave his murderers under similar circumstances as he was dying while being unjustly stoned for rightfully rebuking the unbelief of the Jewish council. *"And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep."* Both Christ and Stephen freely forgave the men who were in the act of doing grievous wrongs against them. Undoubtedly in both cases those perpetrating the sin did not express sorrow or remorse at that time.

Forgiveness is neither easy nor natural, particularly when the hurt is very deep. Having a sincere love for others and fervently praying for one another will have eternal impact for all concerned. *"And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent*

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prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.”

For us to not have resentment over an old hurt does not require us to forget all about it. “Forgive and forget” is familiar advice, but it is not humanly possible to purposely forget something. However, if we forgive someone and we recall the hurt later on, we must choose to focus on the healing that has occurred and not allow bitterness and resentment to rise up every time we think of it. In a natural sense, when we observe an old scar we have the choice of remembering the pain of an old wound, or we can concentrate on the miraculous ability of the body to heal itself. Through forgiveness, we choose to not let the memory dominate our thoughts or define our relationship with the individual, enabled by God’s grace.

An example of such a mistake occurred when Shimei sinned greatly against King David by cursing him and throwing stones and dust at him when David’s son Absalom drove him out of Jerusalem. David freely forgave Shimei when he humbly asked for his forgiveness. *“And Shimei the son of Gera fell down before the king, as he was come over Jordan; And said unto the king, Let not my lord impute iniquity unto me, neither do thou remember that which thy servant did perversely the day that my lord the king went out of Jerusalem, that the king should take it to his heart. For thy servant doth know that I have sinned. . . . But Abishai the son of Zeruiah answered and said, Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the LORD’S anointed? . . . Therefore the king said unto Shimei, Thou shalt not die. And the king sware unto him.”*

Some eight years later, David evidently still harbored a good deal of resentment over Shimei’s offense as revealed by his advice to his son Solomon upon his succession to the throne. *“And, behold, thou hast with thee Shimei the son of Gera. . . . which cursed me with a grievous curse in*

the day when I went to Mahanaim: but he came down to meet me at Jordan, and I sware to him by the LORD, saying, I will not put thee to death with the sword. Now therefore hold him not guiltless: for thou art a wise man, and knowest what thou oughtest to do unto him; but his hoar head bring thou down to the grave with blood.”

Christian forgiveness does not mean we totally forget, but it does require that we remember graciously—without anger, bitterness, and resentment—seeking to follow Paul’s encouragement in our theme verse. May we treat the faults of others as God treats ours, *“For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.”*

(Footnotes)

- ¹ Ephesians 4:32
- ² Matthew 5:43-45
- ³ Matthew 6:14-15
- ⁴ Matthew 18:22
- ⁵ Luke 23:34
- ⁶ Acts 7:59-60
- ⁷ James 5:15-16, 19-20
- ⁸ 2 Samuel 19:18b-23
- ⁹ 1 Kings 2:8-9
- ¹⁰ Hebrews 8:12