

Preacher's Pen points

How Can I Forgive Others?



Recently a lady deeply wounded by her husband's unfaithfulness asked advice columnist Amy how she could overcome her hurt feelings and forgive him. In spite of her friends' advice she had not been able to "get over it".

The difficulty of forgiving others is a problem that all of us may face in our relationships with others. There will be times when we feel we have been greatly wronged by another and the pain of that hurt, it seems, will not go away. May I suggest some things that will help us be more forgiving when the hurt is great?

God instructs us to forgive others.

Paul instructed the disciples of the Lord to embrace a new way of life modeled after God's character: *"And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you"* (Eph. 4:32).

God makes our own forgiveness of sins against Him contingent upon our willingness to forgive others.

After teaching the disciples how to pray, Jesus gave them incentive to be forgiving people: *"For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions"* (Mt. 6:14-15).

We need to forgive because of what unforgiveness does to us.

When we live in anger and hurt, we punish ourselves for the mistakes of others. Instead we must make a conscious choice! Do we want to live in bitterness, or do we want to be free of such feelings? Paul urges us to make the second choice:

"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice" (Eph. 4:31). When we do so, we will feel a great freedom from turning loose of past resentments.

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Perhaps people at times may not want others to feel the relief of being forgiven. Staying angry is just another way of punishing another person for their mistakes; but there is a great danger! When a person who has sinned turns from his sin, the Scriptures reveal he is vulnerable to Satan's attacks and conquest, if forgiveness is not offered to him. Thus, Paul urged the Corinthian church to *"forgive and comfort"* the erring brother, *"lest somehow such a one be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow."* (2 Cor. 2:7).

We need to put our own transgressions in perspective.

What is especially helpful when we are nursing a wrong by someone else is to think about our own transgressions before God. The truth is, nothing anyone does to us can compare with the wrong that we ourselves have committed against God. Jesus in the parable of the debtors (Mt. 18) helps us see that our debt to God is far greater than any debt another owes us due to wrongdoing. And the application is equally clear—if God could forgive us for our sins, as great as they are, then surely we can forgive others in just the same way!

Don't let the wrongs of others turn you into a bitter, unforgiving and unforgiven person! Instead find for yourself the joy and freedom of forgiveness!

—Johnny Felker (www.truthchasers.com)