

November 8, 2009

**HOW DO I FORGIVE? (PART 1)**  
**MATTHEW 18.21-35; COLOSSIANS 3.1-17**

*Every sin committed by or against us as Christians presents us with new challenges and opportunities to mature in the craft of forgiveness. In facing these challenges we must learn to discern properly what shape forgiveness is to take in each situation and then apply the appropriate grace of forgiveness in the situation.*

Goal is *not* to tell you how to react in every circumstance. That is impossible. Goal = give you the tools so that as you discern situations you will be able to apply the tools correctly to the situation.

**EVALUATING THE NEED FOR FORGIVENESS**

Sometimes this evaluation takes no more than a split second. Sometimes it may take much longer. B/c you can't know every situation ahead of time and, therefore, cannot anticipate all contingencies, you can't determine in a cookie-cutter fashion how long the evaluation may take. B/c relationships are complex, sometimes evaluating the situation is very complex.

***1. Evaluating the need for forgiveness must take into account the goal of forgiveness: peace.***

Forgiveness is a means to an end. That end or goal is peace. Peace = a relationship that whole and healthy. It is a relationship of love, free from animosity in which each person in the relationship is fulfilling his responsibilities in service to the other(s).

God demonstrates how peace is achieved in the presence of sin: forgiveness. See the near-bringsings/sacrifices in Tab/Temple. Peace is the goal and it is achieved through forgiveness.

Different near-bringsings/sacrifices for different sins. Resolution to peace takes different paths depending on the sin. Cf. Eph 4.32

*a) What does peace look like in this situation?* Peace does not look the same in every situation depending upon the nature of the sin involved and the breach that it has caused.

E.g. Adam and Eve. Forgiveness but not restoration to the Garden. Sin may radically alter the relationship. Must be taken into account.

If a person is repentant, then the forgiveness that pursues peace and the peace itself will look very different than if you are dealing with an unrepentant person. With an unrepentant person—a person who refuses to accept responsibility for his sin and thus live up to his responsibility in the relationship—you cannot have peace; at least until repentance has taken place.

*b) Is peace possible in this situation?* Does the offender desire reconciliation? Is he willing to own up to his responsibility for the sin and pursue a good relationship with you? Should choose not to hold bitterness, but the relationship will be different.

If you are the one who has sinned against another person: Is the offended person willing to forgive you of your offense? You make seek the other's forgiveness in all the right ways, but unless that other person is willing to forgive you, then you can't have peace.

Forgiveness makes peace *possible*, but it does not make peace *inevitable*. Sometimes only determined after a long time and sustained efforts. But there comes a time when you must reconcile with the fact that reconciliation with the person is not possible.

*c) What is the best way to achieve the goal of peace in this situation?* Decision is not necessarily between what is "right or wrong" but what is "acceptable or best."

Be careful of simply trying to "get away with" doing what is merely acceptable (i.e. fulfilling the "letter of the law").

Consider your own culpability in the situation. "Where do I need to change?" "Did I do anything to encourage this as a response from the other person?" "Do I need to *seek* forgiveness as well as grant it?" *Listen* to the other person.

"We are all sinners" should not necessarily be dragged into the situation. Sometimes used to escape specific responsibility.

Your sin does not excuse the other's sin, but it may have been an encouragement to sin, a stumblingblock, for the other person.

Determine *how* to deal with the other person according to situation and personality. Gentle? Straightforward and hard? Thunder?

**2. Evaluating the need for forgiveness must take into account knowledge of the person and the situation.**

a) *Different responses to different situations.* “All sin is worthy of death and therefore deserves the ultimate punishment.” Wrong! Every sin is not “heinous.” Difference between major and minor offenses/sins.

E.g. disobediently swiping cookies before supper is not the same as the genocide of Nazi Germany.

Distinctions between sins in Lev; particularly high-handed sins (with complete knowledge and w/o repentance) and sins of being led astray (taught wrong, didn’t know it was a sin).

The sinner is culpable in both sins and some punishment is required. But the punishment is different for each.

E.g., difference of the sin between Adam and Eve. Cf. also Lk 12.35-48.

Forgiveness will look different depending on the situation/sin involved.

- Is this a one-time event or a persistent problem?
- Did the person understand what he was doing, or does he really not understand the situation?
- Was the action intentional or was it just negligence?
- Was this a minor offense or a major offense (or maybe somewhere in between)?
- Did the offense cause major damage or little damage?

We are required to *think*. Situations are not easy for a purpose. God calls us to grow up and be like him, determining/judging between good and evil in situations not explicitly spelled out in Scripture.

Heb 5.14, “solid food” ... “discern good and evil.” Garden, Tree of KoGaE. Able to eat the food and take the position when you have learned to exercise judgment. Then you are fit to rule.

E.g. Solomon (1Kg 3.9). No rules about what to do with prostitutes who argue over a baby. After meditating on the Law, he learns wisdom and is able to make a proper judgment.

This is part of working out your own salvation with fear and trembling as Paul exhorts the Philippians (Phil 2.12). You do this in the company of other believers, drawing strength and wisdom from them, but there is a responsibility for you as an individual to do it.

b) *Different responses depending on different relationships.* E.g. Israel is more accountable than the nations (cf. e.g. Am 3.2).

Cf. Ac 17.30 - Gentiles in ignorance (“sins of being led astray”). God overlooked their sin.

The shape and even how long forgiveness takes depends upon a number of factors in a relationship. What is the nature of the relationship? Is it close or distant? Is this a close friend or an acquaintance? Is this my spouse or a close friend? Is this my parent or my spouse?

Sounds very complicated. It is complex, but we work through complex situations every day, sometimes without thinking about them all that much.