

November 22, 2009

HOW DO I FORGIVE? (PART 2)
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.

RESPONDING WITH APPROPRIATE FORGIVENESS

1. *What are some of the tools necessary in the craft of forgiveness?*

Learn the fundamentals well and then the more complex applications will be nothing more than variations on the basics.

a. “Cover up” - Overlooking as Forgiveness

Covering an offense = you will not confront the person or live in bitterness over the situation. You let it go, refusing to make the person pay for his offense.

Prov 19.11: “The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, And his glory *is* to overlook a transgression.”

When to overlook requires discernment of the person and situation. Some questions to ask (fr. Sande, *The Peacemaker*):

- *Is this offense dishonoring to God, affecting this person’s witness and the name of Christ?*
- *Is it damaging your relationship?*
- *Is it hurting others?*
- *Is it hurting the offender?*

Overlooking is appropriate when this is something that is uncharacteristic of the person.

God as our example (cf. Eph 4.32–5.1, forgiving as he forgives). He doesn’t reveal every sin he knows about us all of the time but forgives us of sins unknown to us (cf. Ps 19.12).

b. “fessing up” - Confession and Forgiveness

Taking responsibility for the sin that has caused the breach through confession is necessary for “full forgiveness” (i.e. reconciliation) to take place.

The confession “principle” applies to you if you have sinned against another and to those who have sinned against you. This is not just for those who sin against you. Be careful not to have a double standard.

Confession = *agreeing with and admitting to the fact that you have acted in a way that is not right*. Confession is the acceptance of my responsibility in the situation.

Peace is realized in relationships through fulfilling responsibilities to each other. When sin occurs confession is one of those responsibilities. Faithfulness in a relationship includes confession of sin when it occurs.

Seven A’s of confession (Sande):

1. *Address everyone involved*. The nature of the sin determines the extent to which confession must take place. If the offense occurred just between two people, confession is only between the two of you. More public sin requires more public confession.
2. *Avoid “if,” “but,” and “maybe” in confession*. These are all wiggle words to alleviate some of the burden of the responsibility. When I use these words I am either refusing to admit that I really did wrong, or I am trying to shift the blame to some other person or situation.
- Confession accepts the responsibility for my action without laying any part of that responsibility on someone else. You may have to deal with the other person about his sin that tempted you, but when you willfully do something, that is your responsibility.
3. *Admit specifically*. You sinned specifically, confess specifically.
4. *Acknowledge the hurt*; i.e. how you hurt the other person, or, if another is confessing to you, acknowledging that you have been hurt.

5. *Accept the consequences.* Accepting responsibility may involve going beyond the act of confession to other concrete forms of repentance and restitution.

6. *Alter your behavior.* Confession needs to be coupled with repentance. Confession of sin does not give you or the other person a pass to offend again in the same way.

7. *Ask for forgiveness.* Use the words, "Please forgive me." This is a difficult phrase to utter b/c it acknowledges that you are in debt to the other person and that person has some power over you; i.e. either to retain or release you from the penalty of your sin.

Confession of sin doesn't automatically make everything all right all of the time. Depending on the nature of the sin, confession may just be the starting point. Sometimes forgiveness is a process through which you must work.

You shouldn't intentionally hold bitterness. You ought to be struggling to work through everything. But you may need to deal with recurring emotions and temptations to take vengeance on the other person b/c of the deep hurt involved.

c. "Owning up" - Responsibility and Forgiveness

Forgiveness is *not* antithetical to accountability. Accountability is calling upon someone to own up to and live up to his responsibilities. This is essential if our relationships are to be what they are supposed to be.

May look like vengeance and retribution outwardly in some respects. Difference is the motivation and the goal. Vindictiveness does not care about restoring the relationship. Accountability is seeking to make the relationship whole.

"Full forgiveness"—i.e. reconciliation—may have to be withheld if the other person is not willing to accept responsibility for his sin and take the necessary steps to remedy the situation.

The grace of forgiveness may indeed call upon the person to engage in concrete acts of repentance that will (1) teach and encourage him to mature and fulfill his responsibilities and (2) rectify the situation in such a way so as to take away as many excuses as possible to continue to hold unforgiveness and bitterness.

Dealing with #2: if you are the one who has sinned and is seeking forgiveness, you should be willing to go beyond the "minimal requirements" to make things right. Your attitude should be the removal of all possible obstacles to reconciliation by righting the wrongs that you have done and, thus, eliminating as many of the consequences suffered by the other person *b/c of your sin*.

God's laws of restitution: God was teaching his people to own up to their responsibilities and understand that their relationships were more important than possessions in and of themselves.

"But what if the other person refuses to accept his responsibility?" (1) Re-evaluate the situation and examine whether or not this was truly a sin that needs forgiveness or if you were simply being overly sensitive. (2) If sin has occurred then reconciliation may not be possible.

"But how do I deal with this situation in my own heart?" (1) Acknowledge the limitations of your power. You can't make other people reconcile with you. (2) Trust that God will rectify the situation in this life or the next. You have fulfilled your responsibility.

"How do I relate to the person who refuses to repent?" You will not be able to have a relationship of peace.

"What if the offender dies before reconciliation?" You must choose not to hold bitterness and look in faith to your sovereign God knowing that he had a purpose for that person being in your life and that he will all things right at the last day.

2. How do I know if I am doing well in the craft of forgiveness?

In thought - *replacement principle*: replace bad thoughts about the other person with prayer for them.

In word - the way you speak to and about the other person. Seek to speak well or refuse to exacerbate the breach through words.

In deed - returning good for evil (Rom 12.20-21). One basic deed is praying for the welfare of the other person.