

November 1, 2009

**THE LIFE OF FORGIVENESS:
WHY MUST I FORGIVE?
MATTHEW 6.9-15; COLOSSIANS 3.1-17**

Having been created and re-created in the image of our Triune God and called to grow into his likeness, Christians must learn and live the grace of forgiveness in our relationships because only in this way do we fulfill our purpose as humans and consequently enjoy the salvation-life promised.

Rationale comes from Gen 1.26-28 & Col 3.10 (cf. also Eph 4.17ff.): we are created and re-created in God's image.

1. Because God created us in his image to be in relationship with one another.

Gen 1.26 - "Let us ... our ... our;" 1.27 - "... in his own image ... him ... male and female ... them."

Man is by creation in the image of God a relational being. Fundamentally relates to God and then relates to others and the rest of creation. Woman is created to complete man, but even man as individual is relational before woman's creation.

Each person after this is the result of a relationship (mother and father) and enters into relationship. Both aspects of God's image.

Understanding yourself as being created in the image of God goes to answer what some call one of life's basic questions: "Who am I?" Before you are flesh, bones, organs, etc. you are "image of God." This is your true human identity b/c this is what God declares in your creation.

Purpose as image of God: to live in communion or in relationships of peace with one another just as God himself lives in peace with himself. We are to have communion with God, with one another, and with the rest of creation.

Relationships are not "added on" to who I am but define my identity.

Originally all relationships were of peace. Sin disrupts. It does not destroy image of God but perverts and distorts. E.g. we still have relationships, but they are not what they ought to be.

B/c sin puts relationships to death, perverting God's image, sin makes me (in some sense) "less than human," beastly. In order for us to be fully human, relationships of peace must be restored.

Forgiveness is the pursuit of peace in the face of sin. Forgiveness is necessary for us to be truly human (i.e. what God intended for us.)

God is the first to forgive, pursuing peace in the presence of sin. This is not something "uncharacteristic" of God b/c God always pursues peace in his relationships. It takes this form of forgiveness in the presence of sin, but it is fundamentally the same pursuit.

Forgiveness is the expression of humility and God is always humble. cf. Phil 2.5-8 for the revelation of our humble God in Christ.

To be created in the image of God means that we are created in relationships with one another with whom we are to be pursuing peace through forgiveness. B/c forgiveness is characteristic of God himself and b/c we are created in his image—that is fundamentally who we are as humans— that means to be truly human we must be forgiving people.

2. Because God's purpose for man as his image is realized in Christ and his church.

Cf. Col 3.10 (cf. also Eph 4.17ff.)

The man, Jesus, came first. It was not good for him to be alone. So, at the cross, from his wounded side, God created the woman, the church. Now, we—Christ and his church—exist as the re-created image of God. We are to fulfill God's purpose for us from the beginning.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper now answer for us the question, "Who am I?" I, through the forgiveness of my sins in Christ Jesus, am a member of Christ' body and call God my Father and all other Christians my brothers and sisters.

The sacraments reveal the fact that the grace of forgiveness is fundamental to these relationships. Baptism signifies the initial washing of sins. The Eucharist (in part) signifies that our sins have indeed been forgiven and we have peace with God.

Both of these sacraments are also fundamentally relational. Not just about me personally but places me in relationships with others.

Now you exist as the image of God as defined by God's word proclaimed over you in the sacraments. You are the image of God, having been re-created by God in Christ. You are an individual who exists in relationship with others in the church. This is who you are. This is your identity.

We are brought into this community that is re-created in the image of God through the forgiveness of our sins. Being a part of the community that is now the true image of God, forgiveness of sins must be characteristic of those who belong to this new human race.

We are to forgive one another as Christians b/c we *are* truly human. We are—as individuals and a community—that which God intended from the beginning. Not to forgive would be very uncharacteristic of a member of this family.

3. Because forgiveness is necessary for peace in relationships between the advents.

In short, we are stuck here in history with the problems and complications of sin. Therefore, the practice of forgiveness will always be a necessity in this life.

B/c we have been re-created in the image of God does not mean that we have arrived. We have been set on the right track and are to be pursuing peace.

When we forgive the sins of others, we announce that the new creation has begun and we are a part of it (2Cor 5.17).

Our forgiveness of one another is living announcement of the gospel to the world. Of course, our unforgiveness of one another falsely announces to the world that everything is it has always been. God has not created a new world. We are still in our sins and under their power.

4. Because forgiveness is a part of the life of faith.

Faith = takes God at his word and trusts that word to the point that all of his life shaped by that word. Faith believes what God says and has its thoughts and actions conformed to that word. (cf. Heb 11)

Forgiveness reveals faith b/c (1) it declares that you believe what God has declared about you. When you forgive, one thing you are saying is that you believe that you are created and re-created in the image of God just like God said you were.

Forgiveness is the revelation that you are allowing what God says about you to control what you think and do. Unforgiveness does just the opposite. Unforgiveness allows the sins of others—what they say about you or what they do to you—to define who you think you are.

But when I forgive others, even of their most atrocious sins against me, I am not allowing them to define who I am. When I forgive, my life is being shaped by what God declares about me; who I am, and, therefore, what I am to do.

Forgiveness, therefore, not only frees the other person to some extent. Forgiveness frees me from the control of others' sins.

Forgiveness reveals faith b/c (2) forgiveness declares that I believe that God will do what he says he will do regarding making all things right.

It is not just for people to escape from the penalty of their sins against you. But all things will not be made right here and now.

Faith understands that God will make it all right whether in the near or distant future and is willing to commit it to his hands.

Forgiveness is not magic that makes everything as it ought to be. A form or degree of forgiveness may have to be granted in the face of evil with no resolution in sight.

Whether you have lost face or money b/c of others' sins, whether you have lost your innocence or your health b/c of others's sins, you can forgive b/c you see through the eyes of faith that God will make everything right.

I'm not saying it is easy. It will be a struggle. But it can be done when you believe God's promises.