

Slide 1

Learning To Forgive As God Has Forgiven Us

EPHESIANS 4:31-32

Introduction

1. Have you ever been hurt, more than you ever thought you could.
2. Perhaps a close friend betrayed you:
 - a. He or she revealed a secret which you had shared with them in strictest confidence.
 - b. Suddenly it seemed that everyone knew it and you were embarrassed or even ashamed to be seen in public.
 - How can you ever forgive?
3. Perhaps a co-worker presented your idea as if it were his or her own:
 - a. That person took full credit for it and received a promotion as well as a pay increase.
 - b. Afterwards, this co-worker wouldn't even look you in the eye.
 - c. You, on the other hand, didn't care if you ever saw him or her again.
 - Again, how can you ever forgive?
4. The scenarios are endless:
 - a. We have been lied to or lied about.
 - b. Someone has ruined a cherished possession.
 - c. Another refused to believe you or listen to you.
 - d. One or more of your children have repudiated everything for which you stand.
 - e. A brother or sister has taken advantage of you.
 - f. Your spouse has abused you so badly you hardly have any self-esteem left.
 - g. Someone you thought to be a close friend has stolen your spouse's affections.

- h. A brother or sister in Christ has failed to stand by you when you needed them.
 - ❑ How can we ever forgive?
- 5. Nothing tends to affect our relationships as much as an unforgiving spirit.
- 6. Our continued anger, bitterness and resentment harbored against someone who has wronged us tends to dominate our lives.
- 7. We may not even realize what it is doing to us. We may think the matter is over.
- 8. Still, it is there, eating away at us, affecting our disposition, our physical health and the way we respond to others who may not have hurt us.
- 9. It's the little things which reveal the hurt and anger is still there — looking the other way when they pass, refusing to smile, maintaining a coolness in our voice.
- 10. Then again, we may respond in more volatile ways — malicious gossip, physical aggression.
- 11. What can we do about it?
- 12. A little over half-way through his letter to the Christians in Ephesus, in a section focused on relationships, the apostle Paul made an important point concerning our forgiveness of those who have wronged us.

Slide 2

- 13. Listen to his words:

“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” (Ephesians 4:31–32, NASB95)

- 14. How do we forgive as God has forgiven us?

Slide 3

I. We Must First Learn To Be Understanding Of Others

A. RECOGNIZE WE ALL HAVE WEAKNESSES OF OUR OWN

1. Psalm 103, a psalm written by David, has “forgiveness” as its dominant theme.
2. Throughout the psalm, David provides examples of God’s compassion and grace toward His people.
3. In verse 8, he writes these words, “The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness” (Psalm 103:8, NASB95).
4. In verse 12, David declares, “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:12, NASB95).
5. What is the reason for God’s gracious response toward us? David tells us in verse 14:

“For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust” (Psalm 103:14, NASB95).

6. In other words, God knows what we are like. He knows how weak we are.
7. When our Lord became a man and dwelt among us, He shared the same weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15).

“For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.” (Hebrews 4:15, NASB95)

8. I believe that all of us know, in our heart of hearts, just how *proud, selfish, spiteful, jealous and inconsiderate we can be at times.*
9. If we know this about ourselves, shouldn’t we show a little tolerance for the same faults in others.
10. Is it possible that those who refuse to forgive think they are perfect?

Slide 4**B. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE UNDERSTANDING OF OTHERS?**

1. Does it mean we will always agree with them? No.
2. It means we will try to look at things from the other person’s point of view, whether or not we agree with them.

3. Understanding by itself is not forgiveness.
4. It is, however, a first and very important step.
5. To forgive as God forgives, we must see what God does when He forgives.

Slide 5

II. He Pays For Our Offenses

A. FORGIVENESS IS NOT PRETENDING . . .

1. The offense didn't happen.
2. The offense didn't hurt.
3. When God forgives us, He doesn't pretend the sin never occurred or that it was not an offense to His holiness or His righteousness.

Slide 6

B. FORGIVENESS INVOLVES OUR . . .

1. Facing the fact that the offense did happen.
2. Admitting that it hurt.
3. Deciding to pay for the offense ourselves:
 - a. This is what Jesus taught in a parable on forgiveness (Matthew 18:23-35).
 - 1) In this parable, Jesus tells about a slave who owed his master 10,000 talents — a sum which he could never repay.
 - 2) When the master ordered the slave to be sold along with his wife and children and all that he had, so that repayment could be made, the slave fell to the ground and pleaded with his master to be patient with him, promising to repay all he owed.
 - 3) Jesus tells us the master felt compassion toward his slave.
 - 4) He released him and forgave the debt.
 - 5) In forgiving the debt, the master himself absorbed the loss.
 - b. This is what Paul teaches us that God did:

“God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting

their trespasses against them . . .” (2 Corinthians 5:19, NASB95)

“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” (2 Corinthians 5:21, NASB95)

“He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.” (1 Peter 2:24, NASB95)

4. Giving up our right to hurt others because they have hurt us (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:7).

“Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?” (1 Corinthians 6:7, NASB95)

- ❑ As much as forgiveness may cost us, the expense is usually greater when we withhold it.

Slide 7

III. He Forgets Our Wrongs

A. GOD REMEMBERS OUR SINS NO MORE

1. This is what He promised through His prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah:

“I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins.” (Isaiah 43:25, NASB95)

“ . . . I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”” (Jeremiah 31:34, NASB95)

2. When God forgives, does he truly forget them? Is He no longer able to remember them?
3. This aspect of God’s forgiveness is better understood in Paul’s definition of love: “Love . . . does not take into account a wrong suffered,” (1 Corinthians 13:5, NASB95)

- a. Because God is love, He does not take into account a wrong suffered.
- b. Another way to put this is that God “does not keep a record of wrongs” (1 Corinthians 13:5, HCSB).

Slide 8**B. WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR US TO FORGET?**

1. *We no longer allow the wrong to dominate our thoughts.*
 - a. We dismiss it from our minds.
 - b. We don't keep rehearsing the wrong done to us over and over again with others.
2. *The offense no longer hurts as it once did.*
 - a. While the fact of the offense remains, the deep emotions are gone,
 - b. We are now able to think about it without . . .
 - 1) The bitterness and deep resentment we once felt.
 - 2) Feeling the pain all over again.
3. *We now treat the offender as though the offense never happened.*
 - a. We do not pretend that the offense never happened, because it did.
 - b. However, we treat the offender as though it never happened.
 - c. This is what it means to “keep no record of wrongs.”

Slide 9**IV. He Seeks Our Reconciliation****A. THIS IS THE AIM OF FORGIVENESS**

1. There is no such thing as forgiveness which says, “Well, I'll forgive him, but I don't ever want to be close to him again. He can live his life and I'll live mine.”
2. This is not the way God's forgiveness operates.
3. God seeks out sinful people like us (cf. Luke 19:10).

“For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.””

(Luke 19:10, NASB95)

4. If anything, God actually reaches out to His enemies and works to reconcile them to Himself (cf. Romans 5:10).

“For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” (Romans 5:10, NASB95)

Slide 10

B. RECONCILIATION IS A TWO-WAY STREET

1. In order for us as sinners to be reconciled to God we must acknowledge our sin and repent (turn away from it).
2. There is a lesson in this for us.
3. One-sided forgiveness on our part may relieve the bitterness in us and drain some of the tension out of the relationship.
4. However, there can never be true reconciliation until . . .
 - a. There has been loving confrontation and repentance.
 - b. The wrong has been worked through together.
 - c. Both parties have acknowledged their wrong and are willing to trust each other again.
5. Neither you or I can demand that other people repent, nor can we insist they work through the wrong with us.
6. We can, however, acknowledge our part in the wrong, and then reach out to them to let them know we are willing to work at reconciliation.
7. This is what God expects of us.

10a

8. If you are the offended party, Jesus said you have the responsibility to take the first step (Matthew 18:15).

“If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.” (Matthew 18:15, NASB95)

Slide 11

9. If you are the offender, Jesus said your responsibility is to take the initiative (Matthew 5:23-24).

“Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.” (Matthew 5:23–24, NASB95)

Conclusion

1. Tonight, let me ask you, is there a wall between you and another brother or sister in Christ?
2. Have you been hurt to the point that you just don't think you can forgive.
3. Please know that God wants you to forgive that brother or sister just as He has forgiven you in Christ.
 - a. Be understanding of them in their weakness.
 - b. Be willing to pay for their offenses in full.
 - c. Put the wrong behind you and never look back.
 - d. Reach to that person in an honest effort to bring about reconciliation.
4. If you are here tonight and have never put on Christ in obedient faith, please know that your sins have hurt God in a way that you could never hurt someone else or be hurt by them.
5. However, He has taken the penalty upon Himself and is willing to remember your sins no more if you will repent and come to Him in obedient faith.
6. Are you willing to let Him wash away those sins with His Son's own blood?