

15. Learning to Forgive One Another

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by learning to have fellowship with one another. We saw that fellowshiping with Christ and with one another is learning to share our lives together. One of the great blessings as we grow in our Christian lives is to really be able to share our lives with others and have them share their lives with us. Today, we are going to focus on one of the key principles that make it possible for our children to share their lives fully with others. We will see how to help our physical and spiritual children learn to forgive one another.

Before people place their trust in Christ, many people find it impossible to forgive others, especially those who have greatly hurt them by what they have done or said. Before we look at forgiveness, we want to see why it is impossible for many people who are not Christians to even understand forgiveness. In the New Testament, we find that four roots are mentioned. Two of these roots are negative and make it impossible for many people to forgive. Two of these roots are positive and provide the foundation that makes it possible for Christians to forgive others. We want to help our children learn to understand all four of these roots. First, we will look at the negative roots.

In Hebrews 12:15, we read, “Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.” Here, we see that a root of bitterness can cause trouble in the life of a person and cause that person and many others to become defiled. We have an example of how that bitterness affected Esau in verses 16 and 17. Hebrews 12:16-17 says, “Lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.” Bitterness kept Esau from ever coming to the Lord in true repentance. That root of bitterness developed in the life of Esau because he could not forgive Jacob for stealing the blessing.

A second destructive root is found in 1 Timothy 6:10 where we read, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” This love of money is just as destructive a root as the root of bitterness. 1 Timothy 6:9 says, “But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.” The desire to become rich often causes a person to become bitter and refuse to forgive the people he feels are hindering him from becoming rich.

In contrast, the other two roots in the New Testament provide the foundation to forgive others as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven us. That is why we want to help our children really understand these other two roots. First, Colossians 2:6-7 says, “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.” Here, we see that we want to help our children become rooted in Christ. Once our children become rooted in Christ, He makes it possible for their lives to be transformed. Romans 12:2 says, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed

by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” Christ wants to transform their lives.

Second, Ephesians 3:17-19 says, “That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height--to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” We want to also help our children become rooted in the love of Christ. As our children become rooted in the love of Christ, they will be able to carry out the new commandment of Christ given in John 13:34-35, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” Christians rooted in Christ and His love have His power to forgive others as Christ forgave us.

We see that the Father and Christ both give us examples of what it means to forgive one another. Ephesians 4:32 says, “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.” In this verse, we see that the Father forgave us because we are in Christ. Colossians 3:13 says, “Bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.” In this verse, we see that we are to forgive because of the fact that Christ forgave us.

The word that is translated “forgive” means *to grant forgiveness or to pardon*. It means *to choose to give a favor unconditionally and let go of things from the past so that they are not held against the other person any longer*. To understand what it means to forgive we need to understand several things that God did with our sins at the moment that we placed our trust in Christ. Psalm 103:12 says, “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.” You can go around the earth a million times; if you start out going east, you will still be going east. Aren’t you glad that God didn’t say that He removes our sins as far as the north is from the south? When God removes sin, that sin is gone.

Micah 7:19 describes another thing that God did with our sins at the moment of salvation. That verse says, “He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.” Here, we see that God says that our sins are cast into the deepest part of the sea. Man cannot go to the deepest part of the sea because the pressure is too great. We realize that there is no way that we can get our sins back and that God is not going to bring them back.

Then, Hebrews 10:17 says, “Then He adds, ‘Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.’” I often ask the question, “What is the difference between forgetting and remembering no more?” Most people answer that there is no difference. This verse does not say that God forgets sin because God knows all things. However, what this verse says is that God chooses not to remember and hold our sins against us anymore. In 1 John 2:1-2, the word “propitiation” means that *God is satisfied with the payment that Christ made for our sins and so He does not hold our sins against us any longer*. The Father knows that we have committed sins but He is satisfied with the payment.

We want to teach our physical and spiritual children that these are the three things that they do in order to show true forgiveness to another person. First, we want our children to learn that true forgiveness means that when they choose to forgive the sin of another person, the sin of the other person is gone. It is not something that is stored so that it can be thrown at the person at a later time. As we help our children learn to follow the example of Christ, we want to help them understand that once they forgive a person for a particular sin, they have chosen to let that sin be gone.

Second, we want to help our children learn that true forgiveness means that they will not try to bring that sin back to throw at the person in the future. We want to help them learn to avoid phrases like, “Why do you always...?” or “Why can’t you ever...?” Christ does not throw our past at us and we want to help our children learn to follow His example. Instead, Christ said, in John 8:36, “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.” This freedom is what makes it possible for both we and our children to follow the instructions of Galatians 5:13, where we read, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” True forgiveness makes it possible for us to serve one another in love.

Third, because God was satisfied with the payment that Christ made for our sins, once we accepted the payment that Christ made by repentance and faith, God does not hold our sins against us any longer. We want to help our children gain a full understanding of the greatness of this forgiveness because that is what makes it possible for them to truly forgive others. We want to help our children understand why God does not hold our sins against us any longer. That is explained in the following verses.

Revelation 12:10 tells us what Satan is doing right now. That verse says, “Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, ‘Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.’” Right now, Satan is trying to accuse us before God when we sin. 1 John 2:1-2 tells us how God answers Satan, “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.” Satan accuses us. Christ as our advocate or defense attorney replies that He paid for our sins and we accepted the payment. The Father tells Satan He is satisfied with the payment that Christ made and so He is not holding our sins against us any longer. As our children grow to understand that God is not holding our sins against us, they can ask the Lord to give them the strength to let go of the things that they are holding against another person.

It is a great privilege to show our children by our example what it means to forgive others as Christ has forgiven us. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your physical and spiritual children learn to forgive one another.