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Forgiveness is the fruit of being forgiven

The Bible has much to say about forgiveness—being forgiven and forgiving, God’s forgiving us and us forgiving others. With that in mind, today I am going to touch on just a few aspects. Others that are just as important will have to wait for another time.

Let’s start with God forgiving us of our sins. All of us were born with a sinful nature which we inherited from Adam (see Psalm 51:5; Romans 5:12). Sin separates us from holy God. Being sinful by nature we all sin “and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). We not only are separated from God, but are accountable to Him for our sin which He must judge because He is holy. God graciously, freely forgives us of our sin by Jesus taking our judgment, taking our sin and its punishment on Himself on the cross. We cannot earn it. Jesus told us,

“God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

And the apostle John then wrote,

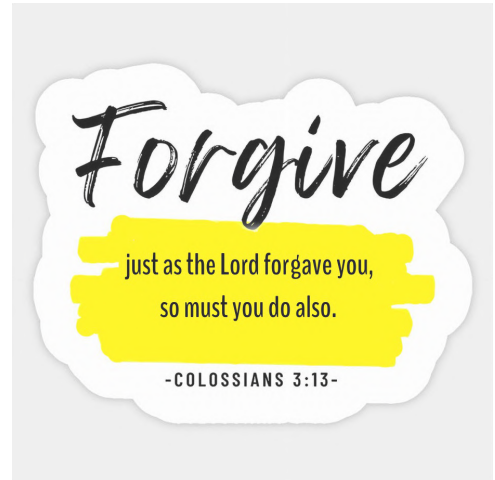
“The one who believes in the Son has eternal life; but the one who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.” (John 3:36)

Now let’s think about forgiving others. The New Testament has examples and commands on forgiving others. God directs us through the apostle Paul,

“¹²as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience; ¹³bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so must you do also.” (Colossians 3:12-13).

And again,

“Be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” (Ephesians 4:32).



Just a few points here.

- Notice in Colossians chapter 3 that forgiveness flows from the Godly character in the preceding verse. Just as God loves us, has given us His love, and then we are to love, so also as God has graciously, freely forgiven us in Christ, we are to forgive others. Forgiveness is the fruit of being forgiven. Just as the Holy Spirit is active in producing the fruit we read of in Galatians chapter 5, so He is at work in us to make us, to grow us in being forgiving people.
- Forgiving is not limited to once, twice, *three strikes and you're out*, but to be ongoing over the long haul. Remember what Matthew records,
“Peter came up and said to [Jesus], ‘Lord, how many times shall my brother sin against me and I still forgive him? Up to seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy-seven times.’”
(18:21-22)
- This kind of forgiveness in part is built on realizing, actually thinking and living without seeking to get even, to avenge ourselves. As Paul wrote,
“Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written: ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.”
(Romans 12:19)

And again, “See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek what is good for one another and for all people.” (2 Thessalonians 5:15)

- One of the big and troubling questions is do we forgive when the other person has not acknowledged their wrongdoing toward us. There are a number of parts to this which I can't go into in this brief time. One to remember is that forgiveness is not the same thing as reconciliation. It is a key component in reconciliation, which is to restore harmony and agreement, to bring people, relationships back to where they ought to be. Forgiveness can be extended freely without the other party being willing to admit the wrong, and/or being interested in reconciliation.
- True forgiveness, Godly forgiveness, comes from a committed decision, the sincerity of our heart and a desire for God's best for all people. And, yes, after making the decision to forgive, at times it can be a multi-step process over time as we work through all the issues and feelings.

Thank God and rejoice in His graciously forgiving you. Allow God to work in you to produce the beautiful fruit of being a forgiving person.

Pastor Lyle