

Unit 9 - Exercise

Read and mark

“!” - for something that helped you

“?” - for something that raised a question

Gospel Forgiveness

Introduction: In Galatians 4:12-20, Paul’s forgiveness of the Galatians for their betrayal of him is so automatic that we can hardly notice it. It is only because his appeal to them (as strong as it is) is so affectionate and free from resentment that we realize the strength of Paul’s forgiving spirit. Later he cautions the Galatians against a growing spirit of resentment and back-biting (Gal.5:15). The more they lose touch with the gospel, the more resentments and grudges grow.

Below is a guide to how the gospel helps us reconcile our relationships with a balance of truth and love. (At times you can see that this project has been used in seminars for married couples! But the principles are basic to all relationships.)

A. THE RESOURCES FOR FORGIVENESS.

1. We need enough humility.

Jesus ties our ability to forgive to our ability to repent. (“*Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors*” Matt.6:12.) This doesn't mean that God forgives our sins because we forgive others. It means that in general we are as forgiven by God as we are forgiving to others because unforgiving people are unrepentant people. The more we hold grudges the less we see ourselves as having done wrong and needing forgiveness; the more we see ourselves as needing forgiveness, the more likely we are to forgive others. Why? Resentment requires a person to sit in the position of Judge (Rom.12:19-20). We can only hold grudges if we feel superior to the other person. Jesus very directly and bluntly tells us that, if we hold a grudge against another person, we are ignorant of how much we owe God. So the first thing we have to see is our own need for forgiveness. We need enough humility to forgive.

Transition: But this is not enough! Because though pride is one reason that we cannot forgive, emotional insecurity is another. So in addition:

2. We need enough “emotional wealth.”

Why is it that we can forgive some wrongs easily but not others? It is because everyone draws a sense of self-worth (a sense that we are worthy of love and respect) from certain objects. No one can validate themselves. We all look to certain people or things to convince us that we are significant. The more certain we are of this, the more “emotionally wealthy” we are--confident, poised, at peace. What are the things that we look to? Steven Covey calls them “personal centers” and Victor Frankl calls them your “meaning centers.” They may be career, possessions, appearance, romance, peer groups, achievement, good

causes, moral character, religion, marriage, children, friendships or a combination of several. However, this means that these things are things that we absolutely must have or we face emotional bankruptcy and death. And all our most powerful feelings are connected to them. We respond in deep guilt if we fail to attain them or in deep anger if someone blocks them from us, or in deep anxiety if they are threatened, or in major drivenness since we must have them, or in despair if we ever lose them completely.

For example. A husband and a wife discovered that a school teacher had been emotionally abusive to their daughter and had fairly ruined her academic year and sent her into counseling. They are both angry at the teacher but the husband has less trouble "getting past" the anger than the wife. Why? Is the husband a less angry person? No, in general he tends to be angrier temperamentally. Does he love his daughter less? No. The issue is that the wife has tied her own self-image and sense of self-worth to her daughter's progress and happiness while the husband does this with his career. As a result, her anger is far deeper, since she is going "bankrupt." She feels, "If my daughter doesn't turn out well, what good am I?" So her anger toward the teacher is powerful.

Ironically, it is both a sense of superiority and a sense of inferiority that makes it hard to forgive. Paradoxically, the two can often go together. We often deal with our own inferiority and insecurity by taking a superior, judgmental position toward someone else.

3. The Character of Forgiveness.

A definition What is forgiveness? When someone has wronged you, it means they owe you; they have a debt with you. Forgiveness is to absorb the cost of the debt yourself. You pay the price yourself, and you refuse to exact the price out of the person in any way. Forgiveness means you free the person from penalty for a sin by paying the price yourself.

The ultimate example We are told that our forgiveness must imitate God's forgiveness in Christ. *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you* (Eph.4:32).

How did God forgive? We are told that he does not *remember* them. That cannot mean that God literally forgets what has happened. It means he "sends away" the penalty for them. He does not bring the incidents to mind, and does not let them affect the way he deals with us.

How did God forgive "*in Christ*?" We are told that Jesus pays the price for the sins. "*It is finished*" means "It has been paid in full" (John 19:30). The Father gave up his Son, and the Son gave up his life. God absorbed the cost in himself.

B. PRACTICAL STEPS FOR FORGIVENESS.

1. Distinguish between granting and feeling.

Realize that forgiveness is granted (often for a long time) before it is felt. Forgiveness is granted first, and felt later (Luke 17:3-10). Forgiveness is not primarily a feeling, but a set of actions and disciplines. In summary, forgiveness is a promise not to exact the price of the sin from the person who wronged you.