

Forgiveness

The church is populated with people who sin. Normally when someone sins against us they hurt us. We often react in one of two ways: we either "blow up" or "clam up". Neither of these responses is biblically appropriate. If we are going to live in harmony with the others in God's Kingdom we need to learn how to forgive. Read Ephesians 4:26-32.

1. Is rage sinful? In Ephesians 4:31, which sinful responses listed could be considered as "Blowing Up"?
2. Which of these responses would be "Clamming Up"?
3. What is the proper response to being hurt?
4. How long do we have to get rid of our anger?

II. Ephesians 4:32. Sometimes when we are sinned against we find it very difficult to forgive. Read Matthew 18:15-34.

1. When we see someone sin what should we do about it? (See also Matthew 7:1-5). Why?
2. Suppose they don't listen? What should we do then?
3. Who should the confrontation benefit?
4. What should our attitude be?
5. What does it mean to forgive? See verses 27 and 30.
6. Why should we forgive?
7. Should we forgive even if the offender refuses to repent?
8. What are the consequences of not forgiving? (See also Mt. 6:12-15)

APPENDIX

Covenant of Forgiveness

The covenant of forgiveness is necessary in a fallen world when conflict often leads to a constantly deteriorating cycle of destruction and fragmentation. The following summarizes the steps in dealing with such problems.

Forgiveness is a promise and thus falls under the category of a covenant. The covenant of forgiveness is practiced between two parties: a villain (the one causing the hurt through sin) and the victim (the one absorbing the pain). Forgiveness is a gracious act (it cannot be forced and is not owed) on the part of the victim toward the villain and is a threefold promise:

1. A promise the victim will not throw up the crime in the face of the villain in the future in order to gain some advantage.
2. A promise that the victim will not be talking about the crime to others and thus injure them. In this case the victim now becomes the villain and must exercise the villain's part.
3. A promise that the victim will not rehearse the incident over and over again in their mind thus "nursing the grudge". This perhaps is the most difficult thing to do for someone in this habit. However a review of 2 Cor 10:3-5 and Phil. 4:8 will show that this is possible although it may take some practice.

There are 4 steps to be prayerfully followed:

1. **CONFRONTATION:** The victim needs to approach the villain in love, having the logs removed from his own eye and seeking the good of the villain (Mt. 7:1-5). This means that the victim should already have forgiven the villain just as God has forgiven him (cf. Mt. 18:21ff. Eph. 4:31,32). If the villain is in a position of authority over the victim (as in the case of children approaching parents) the victim needs to approach the person with an attitude of respect and honor (cf. I Timothy 5:1-5).

2. **REPENTANCE:** The Villain sees his sin from this revelatory experience and takes full responsibility for his crime. There is no place for blame shifting, or excusing his actions based on the sin of another. **THERE IS NO EXCUSE FOR SIN!** We are responsible to act righteously and also **REACT** righteously (cf. Romans 12:17-21). The correct response for the villain is repentance toward God and confession toward the victim. The correct confession is "I was wrong for..." (not "I am sorry", although the villain may be).

3. **RECOURSE:** If the villain refuses the light, or excuses or justifies his actions, the victim needs to take the next steps in Mt. 18. He should seek out an objective brother to go with him who can also mediate if it is merely a matter of misunderstanding.

4. **FORGIVENESS:** Upon seeing the sincere humility of the villain, the victim, filled with the Holy Spirit and in full knowledge of the great forgiveness God has granted to him when he deserved only condemnation (Mt. 18:22-34), says: **I FORGIVE YOU**, thus making the covenant. In the process the victim absorbs the penalty and pain of the crime.

5. **RESTITUTION:** The Villain should seek from the Lord what restitution is required on his part and implement the plan.

The result of the covenant of forgiveness should be reconciliation in the relationship. Failure to do forgive may result in resentment, bitterness, and fragmentation in the relationships of the family, the church, and ultimately with the Lord. Practiced regularly it will transform relationships.