

FORGIVENESS

HOW TO GET ALONG WITH
EVERYBODY ALL THE TIME

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SECTION ONE

Granting Forgiveness

CHAPTER 1

Why Should I Forgive?

The way we treat our fellow man is a direct gauge of our relationship with God. The Lord Jesus takes the way we relate to others personally. “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matt. 25:40). Consequently, to be at odds with a fellow Christian spells double trouble: not only are we at odds with our brother, but we are also at odds with Jesus in him!

Everybody these days is talking about “priorities.” Whether in the business world, politics, education, or Christian ministry, “priorities” is a popular buzzword. Depending on the group and its objectives, priorities will surely vary. But what is the foremost priority of the Christian life according to the Bible? What is first on God’s agenda?

Jesus spelled it out clearly. “Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; **first be reconciled** to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift” (Matt. 5:23-24, emphasis added).

Reconciliation is God’s priority for you and me. It precedes giving, service, and sacrifice. So important is reconciliation

that Jesus said we should “leave there [our] gift” and “first be reconciled.” Before giving and serving, our Lord demands reconciliation. But why?

The Old Testament declares that any high priest who touched a dead animal was ceremonially unclean. Once defiled, he was not allowed to carry out his priestly duties until he had gone through a purification process. Touching a dead animal would not in itself prevent the priest from carrying out his duties. Efficiency was not the issue. He could have easily gone through the motions, but his service was unacceptable to God because he was personally contaminated. Here is a worthy principle: the acceptability of any gift is determined by the acceptability of the giver. If the giver is unfit, the gift is unacceptable, even abominable in God’s sight. God will not accept a gift if the giver is personally contaminated by unreconciled relationships.

That fact is why God said we must first attempt to be reconciled. Broken relationships so contaminate us before God that our service is unacceptable. We must first seek reconciliation. As Christians, our vertical relationship with God is affected by our horizontal relationships with others. If we are to stabilize our relationship with God, often we must begin by first stabilizing horizontal relationships.

The word *reconciliation* means “to be at peace with.” Our fallen nature was at enmity with God, but the Lord Jesus reconciled us to God by His death on the cross. The enmity is gone once we are saved; we are at peace with God. Reconciliation means putting things right when things have gone wrong. When the fact that we have offended someone—intentionally or unintentionally, knowingly or unknowingly, willingly or unwillingly—comes to our attention, our responsibility is to drop everything and go to the offended party. Then in humility and sincerity, we seek to restore the relationship. The response of the offended party may be positive or negative. But once we obey God, we are free, and the offended party’s response is between him and God.

Scripture teaches the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation. To be “on the outs” on earth means we are out of touch with heaven. God admonishes us to keep open communication lines in marriage “that [our] prayers be not hindered” (1 Pet. 3:7). For example, when a husband is not on speaking terms with his wife, he is not on speaking terms with God.

Herein lies the root of much spiritual sickness. Few realize how unforgiveness, hurt feelings, and adverse relationships dramatically affect our relationship with God. The Apostle

John said, “For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” (1 John 4:20). In other words, if we cannot properly relate to human beings, how can we pretend to be rightly relating to God?

Jesus said, “**First be reconciled.**” If this matter of reconciliation and forgiveness is first on Jesus’ list, it must be first on ours as well. We will clearly see the importance of forgiveness in subsequent chapters, which discuss in more detail the consequences of not forgiving.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL GROWTH

Why Should I Forgive?

- 1) The “first” directives in Scripture focus on God’s priorities for our lives. Describe why forgiving our offenders is on God’s priority list for us.
- 2) What is the essential meaning of “reconciliation”? Are there any current relationships in your life that you cannot describe using this definition?