

## Forgiving with Your Forgiveness

You spend with your money, work with your education & experience, and play with your hobbies and recreational talents. You're able to love with your love, believe with your faith, run with your strength and dare with your courage. But do you truly forgive out of the vast reservoir of your own forgiveness? If you withhold this valuable resource, it will only be to your own detriment, as we will see in today's Templates of Truth.

Paul exhorted the believers in the church at Colossae to *forgive each other...just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you* (Colossians 3:13). He didn't just tell them to forgive, but he told them how to forgive. They were to express forgiveness to each other in the same way they each experienced the personal forgiveness of God. That remains the Biblical standard that governs human relationships today, particularly those relationships among believers in the church.

There are three ways each of us experience the personal forgiveness of God. First, it is **immediate** – *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness* (I John 1:9). There is no delay in God's application of grace & forgiveness, when our repentance and confession is genuine & sincere. Second, it is **immeasurable** – *As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us* (Psalm 103:12). The picture of the Psalmist is that God transfers our forgiven sins into an infinite place where they can never be reached or retrieved ever again. Third, it is **immutable** – *I, even I, am the One who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins* (Isaiah 43:25). God chooses to regard our forgiven sin with such total irrelevance that He puts it completely out of mind. There is no more total & complete forgiveness from sin that a person can experience than that which is offered and expressed by God. So, it is this kind of forgiveness that Paul upholds as the standard by which believers express & experience forgiveness among each other.

Unfortunately, that is not the way it works among all believers. With some, the offense is so great they dig their stubborn heels into the sand and determine they will never forgive. With others, they piously declare they have forgiven, but they can never forget. Many forgive, but they attach certain "consequences" to the offense that are born out of their own self-made expectations, opinions and demands, which often have no Biblical justification. Then there are those who forgive, but who invoke a disassociation of fellowship to the terms - they want the offender to go to church somewhere else. They can "forget" as long as the offender is no longer around to "remind" them. As typical as these responses are, none of them meet the standard Paul sets for how God forgives. To one degree or another, these responses fail to be immediate, immeasurable or immutable.

An old saying declares, "two wrongs don't make a right!" Indeed, two wrongs simply make a third wrong. That is especially true in this context. The point is made emphatically clear by Jesus Himself – *For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also*

*forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions* (Matthew 6:14-15). Most Christians have never considered that their unwillingness to forgive another person for some offense has actually forfeited them of their own forgiveness from God. What a tragedy! There are Christians living defeated lives and churches that are dying because of the lack of Godly forgiveness that exists in their hearts. Jesus revealed that an unforgiving spirit even discredits your gifts offered to God – *If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar; and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother and then come and present your offering* (Matthew 5:23-24). Jesus is teaching that our money, our time, our talents or any other gift we offer to God is unacceptable to Him as long as we harbor unforgiveness in our heart toward another. It is sobering to think how many Christians might be in dire straits spiritually because of these truths, and they're not even aware of the serious nature of their condition or why. The consequences for unforgiveness on the part of the offended are just as real and extenuating as those experienced by the offender. Two wrongs don't make a right!

Is there someone in your life you need to forgive today? Some people have held resentment, anger and bitterness in their hearts for years toward another because of past offenses. Whether it is a fellow believer, friend or family member, God rejects your sin of unforgiveness just as He rejects the sin of the one you have been offended by. Your unwillingness to resolve the issue and restore the relationship is only compounding your guilt before God. You say, "It's not my place to resolve the issue. He (or she) should come to me!" If Jesus had taken that approach to your sinfulness, the cross would still be waiting for your death and not His. Be like God today. Overwhelm your offender with the grace and mercy of total & complete forgiveness (just like He did for you)...and don't forget to tell them so...then live it out in restored fellowship with them once again.

That's today's Templates of Truth. This is your Bible teacher, Rick Smith, reminding you to attend church this Sunday for Bible study and worship, pray for one another, and always strive to abide in Christ. Until next time, have a blessed and glorious day in the Lord Jesus.