

## FORGIVENESS

(Part 1 of 3)

People by nature are not forgiving. Because it is so foreign to fleshly human nature, people find it very difficult to forgive others. Yet nothing so characterizes the new nature of Christians as forgiveness, because nothing so characterized the nature of their Lord as did forgiveness. We all remember the striking and incomprehensible words of Jesus when He said, “Father forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). He was betrayed, falsely convicted, beaten, spat upon, and unjustly nailed to a cross to die an agonizing death, and the Son of God harbored no hatred for His tormentors, but instead offered them forgiveness.

Following the pattern of his Lord’s forgiveness, Stephen’s last words were, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge” (Acts 7:60). While being stoned for having committed no crime, other than preaching the gospel, Stephen’s heart was not filled with bitterness, but compassion for his executioners. You and I have not suffered in regard to how some have suffered, yet we find it difficult to forgive the slightest offense.

Forgiveness reflects the highest of all Christian virtues, because it so clearly reflects the character of God. A person who forgives is a person who emulates godly character. Nothing so much demonstrates God’s love as His forgiveness. A person who does not forgive is therefore a person lacking in godly character. And without godly character, no matter how orthodox one’s theology or how outwardly impeccable one’s morals appear to be, they are not acting in accordance to God’s will, or God’s character. “A Christian who will not relinquish a hateful, resentful attitude toward someone who has wronged him is a person who knows neither the true glory of his redeemed humanity nor the true glory of God’s gracious divinity. An unforgiving Christian is a living contradiction of His new nature in Christ. It is central to the heart of God to forgive, and only the Christian who radiates forgiveness radiates true godliness.”

Christians need to forgive because they themselves need forgiveness. Forgiveness is therefore the key to spiritual unity in the church, because it is the key to love and the key to all meaningful relationships. Only forgiveness can break down the walls that sin continually erects between people, including God’s people.

Solomon was absolutely correct when he wrote, “The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression” (Proverbs 19:11). In other words, a man’s discretion makes him slow to anger.

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