

Resolving Relationship Issues To Peace

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Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us....For if you forgive men their sins, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you don't forgive others for their sins, then your Father will not forgive you for your sins. (Matthew 6:12-15)

Forgiveness is the central and overriding foundation in every relationship. If one cannot forgive, then they will be ineffective in ever working out fellowship with others.

A man's discretion makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook a transgression. (Proverbs 19:11)

Every day we tend to do little things that may offend others, as well as feel offended by the actions of others. As you mature in love, you learn to quickly forgive those around you for any thoughtlessness or insensitivity. It is a reflection of the Spirit of Christ within you when your first response to the actions of others is mercy.

*** How do I forgive?**

Forgiveness is a choice of the will from the heart, often an act of faith that is apart from any "feelings." As we initially received forgiveness from God by an act of faith and feelings followed, so we are to forgive others by faith (and out of obedience) and feelings will follow as well.

*** How do I know if I haven't forgiven someone?**

One way to know is if you happen to see or hear about a certain person and you begin to feel an old hurt feeling or angry emotion rise up inside of you. This usually indicates some stuffed or hidden resentment towards that person.

*** How do I get rid of feelings of resentment even after I've chosen to forgive?**

If you continue to feel hurt by another's actions (no matter how small or insignificant) then you must go to them and "work out fellowship" with them. Otherwise, the stuffed feelings will come back later with a vengeance, and you'll find yourself relating to that person from a posture of unreality and superficiality.

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church... (Matthew 18:15-17)

An offense should never be shared with anyone other than the offender (in exceptional cases a spouse may share with a spouse or someone may seek the counsel of an elder. But this is not to be the case forever. The Lord would have us get to the place where we never need to share with anyone other than the offender). The degree to which we learn to obey the Lord's command in this area is a reflection of the maturity of His love in our lives. Disobedience in this area often gives considerable ground to the enemy in spreading anger, resentment, bitterness and third party judgment. There's a warning against such division in Proverbs 6:16, 19.

If you bring your offering to 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)

A lot of folks tend to get confused at this point. It makes sense for me to go to another when I have something against them, but do I need to go to them when they have something against me? "Why should I?" many say. "It's their problem! I'll just wait for them to come to me!" Jesus, however, says that

we need to go to the other party regardless of who's offended by whom. The issue is not who's right or who's wrong, but rather to be loving.

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in a fault, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness and gentleness; looking to yourselves lest you too be tempted. (Galatians 6:1)

*** How do I "Work Fellowship Out" with others?**

Working out your fellowship with others should be approached only after time spent with the Lord to get your "attitude" right. If you go into a situation with your guns blazing, you'll only create more problems. It's always best to share what's going on inside of you instead of blasting the other party with what you perceive is going on inside of them. This takes humility and true honesty. When you realize that you have the same potential to do the same offense then you'll approach the situation with more meekness. (The truth is, you've probably been guilty of the very same thing yourself, otherwise the other person's offense would not have bothered you. What we're unwilling to face in ourselves is usually what we're quickest to judge in others).

*** Suppose I get with the person and the problem is still not worked out?**

Remember, Jesus said to then take with you one or two others and meet with them again (Matthew 18:16). Usually, it's best to try to draw in someone with spiritual authority over their lives at this point (an elder, pastor, discipler, etc.).

*** Suppose I still have lingering feelings even after several attempts to work it out?**

Forgiveness is a choice. Sometimes you may need to choose to forgive the other party many, many times before all of the feelings of hurt are gone. This may be what Jesus meant when He said we are to forgive 70 times 7 times. Sometimes the memory of a past hurt can indeed rise up within us hundreds of times. Look at forgiveness as a spiritual warfare weapon, as a dagger you carry in your belt - ever ready to break the entangling cords of bitterness and resentment (or unhealthy bondings between yourself and the other party).

If the feelings still persist, ask God to show you what it is in you that's not willing to forgive and release. Many times, difficulty to forgive others in an area indicates a similar problem with the unforgiver. As someone once said:

"it's not what's bugging you about your brother that's the issue, it's what's in you that's being bugged."

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