

When it's okay NOT to forgive

Written by Bill Perkins

Okay, you already know the answer: It's never okay NOT to forgive. At least according to Jesus. But there must be situations where God would flex a bit on this. For instance, are we supposed to forgive someone who repeatedly traumatizes us? Or, repeatedly treats us unjustly? Or, repeatedly lies to us? Or, repeatedly cheats us?

The Key Word

Repeatedly is the key word in each of those questions? Forgiveness for a single offense is one thing, but if we're repeatedly wronged, that's a different story altogether. I might offer the other cheek if slapped once, but don't try it again and expect me to stand there and not retaliate.

Or, what about the person who disrespects me and then apologizes, only to do it again? The disciples thought they were being generous when they asked the Lord if they were expected to forgive someone up to seven times. Jesus responded with a shocking command: "Jesus answered him, 'I don't tell you as many as seven, but as many as seventy times seven."

So the kingdom of heaven is like a king who decided to settle accounts with his servants." (Matthew 18:22). As tough as that sounds, Jesus went even further when he said, "And if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him" (Luke 17:4).

Wait a Minute

Wait a minute. If someone wrongs me seven times in a day and each time promises not to do it again--which is what repentance means--I would conclude they had not repented.

The Core of the Issue

This is where we get to the core of the issue: My forgiveness is not dependent on how often I'm wronged, OR, the sincerity of an apology.

Why? Because we are to "forgive one another, as God has forgiven you through Christ" (Ephesians 4:32). And how has God forgiven us in Christ? Hasn't he forgiven us for those offenses we repeatedly commit against him and others?

As God's children and possessors of his Spirit our forgiveness isn't withheld because of repeated offenses. Nor is it based on the sincerity of an apology or promise not to repeat a wrong. We forgive as an expression of the life of Christ within us.

A Personal Update

PERSONAL UPDATE: Wow! After listing our home for sale, a single open house, three full price offers which fell through, we took our house off the market. I asked the Lord to have someone knock on our front door with a full price cash offer. It didn't happen. But someone did park in front of our home. Curious as to why they were there, Cindy approached the car.

The driver said she had seen our home online and would like to view it, if it was still for sale. I was in Florida and would fly to DC so she told her to call in two weeks. Two weeks later, the couple viewed our house and made a full-priced cash offer. We stayed in the home through Christmas and the New Year. We're now in an apartment as our new home is being built.

During the last week we worked between 14-17 hours a day, getting to bed between four and seven AM--that because the organizers of the estate sale didn't leave until 3 PM and didn't want us around until they left. At 5 PM on Monday, January 15th we handed over the keys (had we been late we would have had to pay a \$5,000 fine). Whew!

A few days after moving we flew to CA where we're ministering freedom to the leadership of a Bay Area church. Saturday we fly home and on Sunday I speak at Grace Baptist Church in Saint Helens, OR. We've been so busy we still have stuff in our cars and the apartment is a mess. But we made it through the move and had fun doing it. God is with us and he is good!