

Indiscriminate Forgiveness?

Many people, including Christians, believe that we are obligated to forgive someone whenever they commit a sin. For instance, if a man steals \$500 from me, is arrested and put on trial. Many believe I should go ahead and forgive him - even though he remains unrepentant. Some see this as the noble thing to do; something that will help me. However, there is no biblical basis for this type of thinking.

The Bible does teach we are to forgive others, but the forgiveness has conditions attached to it. The person who committed the sin must seek forgiveness. Jesus said, "Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him" (Luke 17:3,4).

What happens when that same person does not repent and seek forgiveness? Are we to forgive anyway? No. We have no authority from God to do so. Paul wrote, "...forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:32). He will forgive us after we repent (Acts 8:22-24), and that is the pattern we should follow.

If we are authorized or even compelled to forgive someone before he or she repents, what does that do to church discipline? The person from whom a church withdraws is to be forgiven only after that person repents (1 Cor. 5:1-5; 2 Cor. 2:6-11; 7:8-11). Forgiveness before the point of repentance would make the entire process a futile exercise in chaos.

Further, consider the scenario Jesus gives us in Matthew 18:15-17. One brother sins against another. If a one-on-one conversation brings repentance from the sinner, then the issue is solved. However, if the one in the wrong does not make correction, then the offended brother does not forgive him; he takes the next step to bring repentance. The principle laid down is that forgiveness, and thus reconciliation, is extended when the sinner repents, not before.

People must be accountable for their actions. Sinners need to know they are sinners and lost until they repent. If they have personally sinned against us and/or the church, they need to feel the burden of their sin. Our desire for peace or to simply not deal with the problem will not solve the issue. God does not approve of us putting aside sin in the absence of repentance; something that may endanger our souls.

- by Steven F. Deaton

"Why Are You So Bitter?"

If someone asks us this question, and they are "right on the money," then we had better take a long, hard look at ourselves and our mental outlook. Whatever unpleasant experience we have had to endure, however we may have been mistreated, whatever disappointment we have had to cope with, there is no justification for being an unkind and bitter person.

Other people's treatment of me really has nothing to do with my personal attitude. The same goes for the abundance of blessings that others might enjoy but are missing in my life. No, my attitude – whether I will be bitter or not be bitter – that is a matter of choice.

I cannot control every single circumstance that exists in my little part of the world, but I am responsible for controlling my disposition or outlook. I choose the attitude that I will demonstrate.

Be honest with yourself. Are you bitter about something from the past or present? Are you still holding a grudge about something that happened long ago? Are you still bitter against your parents because they refused to let you participate in certain activities when you were growing up? If you are carrying bitterness in your heart for these or other petty matters, then you need to get over it!

Repent of your bitter spirit, and lay it aside forever. Go to the one(s) against whom you have been so bitter, confess your wrong, and try, as much as possible, to make amends and be reconciled with them. Surely none of us wants to become a "bitter old man/woman."

The truth is, there is no place for a Christian of any age to be eaten up with bitterness. Which would you rather do: go through life as a bitter person, or go to heaven? That is a serious choice, is it not? The crown of life awaits those that love the Lord out of a pure heart (James 1:12; 4:8). Such a heart has no room for bitterness in it.

- via *The Northside Anchor, Calhoun, GA*

Should We Answer, or Not?

*“Answer not a fool according to his folly,
lest thou also be like unto him.”*

*“Answer a fool according to his folly,
lest he be wise in his own conceit.”* (Proverbs 26:4-5)

At first glance these two successive verses seem to be in direct contradiction with one another. But a closer examination yields important information on how we should properly deal with those who are foolishly opposing the truth.

In both verses the Hebrew verb *‘anah* (‘answer’) is used, but in different forms. In the first verse the verb is in an imperfect form, describing an unfinished action. In essence it is telling us that we should not continuously engage a person in foolish challenges to truth. Typically, such a person will repeatedly bring up his flawed arguments. For instance, we’ve all suffered through Bible classes wherein an individual will bring up his ‘pet’ theory on some weird topic every time he has a chance to do so. He’s been answered in the past, but he ignores the truth and holds tightly to his erring view. We want to offer no support to his flawed arguments, no support for his erroneous conclusions. We are to cut off such discussion.

In the second verse the verb is in an imperative form, mandating action. The gist of the command is that, while not accepting his view or repeatedly discussing it, we should powerfully answer his argument and show the absurdity of it. Having demonstrated this, it will not allow the foolish one to be wise in his own eyes. In other words, his arguments will be refuted and he will have no basis for pride or arrogance. He has been ‘put in his place’, so to speak.

The overall meaning is this: Don’t engage such a person in endless quarreling, but definitively refute the error. Approaching it this way will both answer the error and demonstrate that, those who have been trying to teach it are not as wise as they thought they were.

Taking a stand for God’s truth, and doing it in the best and most effective ways, is a difficult challenge. We should all pray, study, and apply ourselves to this vital work. Think!

- by Greg Gwin