

FORGIVENESS

“For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” (Matt 6:14-15)

THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE PROBLEM

There you have it! Forgiveness is not an option. Forgiveness is absolutely essential to salvation. If you do not forgive, you will not be forgiven.

God not only expects you to forgive your enemies, He also commands that you love them: **“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” (Luke 6:32-36)**

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” (Matt 7:1-2)

“because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful.” (James 2:13)

IF YOU WANT TO BE SAVED, YOU MUST FORGIVE!

THE SOURCE OF THE PROBLEM

Satan is obviously the source of our problems for God is not the God of disorder but of peace (1 Cor. 14:33). Confusion and disorder do not come from God! When God created Eden, for example, it was a paradise. There was no confusion, no disorder, no storms, no arguments, and no death. Even animals, that are now vicious predators, ate green herbs in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 1:29 - 30).

In the midst of the garden, as you know, there were two trees. First was the tree of life, and then was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:9). The Hebrew word translated as “evil” in this verse is “ra”. According to Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance it comes from the primary root “ra-a” which means to spoil by “breaking to pieces”. God is the Author of unity and wholeness, Satan is the author of fragmentation and division.

Since God does not create division and disorder, the influence of Satan is easily recognized: **“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;**

idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.” (Gal 5:19-21)

Lets take a closer look at this passage as it specifically relates to dissensions and factions, which “obviously” are produced by an unforgiving spirit. The Bible word for “factions” is “haireisis” from which we get our English word “heresy” It seems that heresy starts with hatred. Please consider:

Step one on the road to heresy is “hatred.” This is the Greek word *echthru*, also translated as “enmities” in the Bible. This word is used to describe the enmity between Pilate and Herod (Lk. 23:12). It is used to portray the explosive hatred between Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:14-16). Vine in his *Word studies* describes it as the “opposite of love.” Note: The road to heresy begins with the lack of love!

Step two on the road to heresy is “discord” This is the Greek word, *eris*, which is also translated as “strive.” It is defined by Thayer (p. 249) as “contention, strife, wrangling.” It is translated as “debates” in I1 Corinthians 12:20. When you do not love someone, it is not too difficult to get into a wrangle or a debate with them over almost anything,

Step three on the road to heresy is “jealousy” This is the Greek word *zelos*. Thayer (p. 271) defines the word in two ways. First of all it is used in a good sense of “zeal, ardor in embracing, pursuing, defending anything,” All zeal, however, is not good so the word also means “an envious and contentious rivalry, jealousy.” When people who do not love one another have had a wrangle or a debate, it is not unusual to find “an envious and contentious rivalry” between them.

Step four on the road to heresy is “fits of rage” It is the Greek word *thumos* which is defined by Thayer (p. 293) as “passion, angry heat, anger forthwith boiling up and soon subsiding again.” This word emphasizes a “sudden burst of anger” as opposed to the word “orga” which means indignation which arises gradually, It is translated in Revelation as “glow” or “ardor,” When people who do not love one another have fallen into debates and contentious rivalries, it is not unusual to find someone blowing up in a glowing, passionate burst of anger.

Step five on the road to heresy is “selfish ambition” This is the Greek word *erithiu* which is also sometimes translated as “factions.” This is a very picturesque word which is only used eight times in the New Covenant Scriptures. Aristotle used the word to represent those “who electioneer for office, courting popular applause by trickery and low arts.” The word is derived from “erithos” which means “working for hire, a hireling.” Thayer (p, 249) states that the word is used in the New Testament as a “courting distinction, a desire to put one’s self forward, a partisan and factious spirit which does not disdain low arts,” When people who do not love one another have been through a contentious battle, and when someone has erupted in a glowing and passionate burst of anger, it is not unusual to find them seeking to further their views through a low and dirty campaign. Dirty politics in the church is only one step removed from heresy.

Step six on the road to heresy is “dissensions” This is the Greek word *dichostasia* which is also translated as “divisions.” It is defined by Thayer (p. 153) “to stand apart, dissension, division.” After a church gets involved in dirty politics, divisions soon appear.

At last we have arrived at *heresy, which means “choosing” or “choice.”* Once divisions start to appear many people feel compelled to “choose up sides” and that is what heresy is all about. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, ‘For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you,’ Is it possible that heresies can be healthy for the Body of Christ? This seems to be exactly what the Scriptures teach. God has provided a way for poison to be extracted from the human body, and He has also provided a way for poison to work its way out of the Body of Christ. The “approved” will always cling to Christ. No amount of pressure can force them into a faction or divide their loyalty to Jesus. Those who do not possess such love for the Master will find it natural to express their carnal nature in support of some tangent. Perhaps some of you who read these words are already well on your way down the road to heresy. Your lack of love has led to several clashes already, and your pride has all but hidden Christ from view. Remember that those who engineer divisions are sensual and void of the Spirit (‘Jude 19). Do not forget that the Lord hates the one who sows discord among brethren (Prov. 6:19). Forget all of your allegiance to friends and factions and cling only to Jesus. “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Ps. 133:1).

Remember! The actions prompted by Satan are obvious. God wants to bring everyone together in Christ, and Satan wants everyone to be divided. We repeat, confusion and disorder are easily recognized, but do not come from God. In the home, in the church, and in society, the devil is the author of confusion.

THE SOLUTION IS NOT EASY

From the very beginning God has wanted us to love one another and not be like Cain (1 Jn. 3:11 - 12). The Law of Moses commanded that we love our neighbor as we love ourselves (Lev. 19:18). Obeying this commandment is so difficult, however, that Jesus called it the narrow way.

Please consider:

Matt. 7:13, 14 describe a narrow gate and a wide gate. Don’t forget that the verse just before contains what we call the “Golden Rule”. These verses need to be considered together. What God has joined together man should not put asunder.

Throughout the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is constantly contrasting legalism with love.

- The law said don’t kill but Jesus demands that we not even be angry.
- The law said don’t commit adultery, but Jesus does not want us to even look with lust.
- The law regulated making oaths, Jesus does not want us to swear at all.
- The law said: “An eye for an eye” but Jesus demands that we love our enemies.

In each instance the teachings of Jesus are far more “narrow”, or demanding than the Law of Moses. Now consider again the teachings of Jesus about the “narrow way” while considering the “Golden Rule” as a part of the context.

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. “ (Matt 7:12-14)

The narrow way of which Jesus spoke is the confining philosophy and lifestyle of loving your fellow men in the same way you love yourself. The word “narrow” is from *thlibo* which comes from the word for pressing or pressure and relates to that which presses or burdens the spirit, The word “small” is from *stenaō* which means to groan. The narrow way and the small gate is the way of compassionate concern for others which presses down upon us and causes us to love our neighbors as ourselves.

THE NECESSITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The 12 apostles “knew” all about love. They had heard Jesus teach about love for three years. They could have written the correct answer on every test. Unfortunately, however, they lacked the power to manifest forgiveness and love in their own personal lives.

Early in their association with Christ He empowered them to work miracles. For example, in Matt. 10:8 Jesus commissioned them to: **“Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.” (Matt 10:7-9)** They could obviously do what He empowered them to do.

Forgiving one another, however, required a special measure of faith. When Jesus commanded the twelve to forgive an offending brother seven times in a single day - the apostles said to the Lord **“increase our faith” (Lk. 17:5)**. They were obviously struggling with forgiving one another.

On the night before Calvary there was another dispute among the apostles as to which of them would be the greatest (Lk. 22:24). It was on this night that Jesus tried to teach them humility and forgiveness by girding Himself with a towel and washing their feet (Jn. 13:1 - 17). Intellectual answers, however, are insufficient. If the apostles had been able to forgive one another they would not have been arguing in the first place.

The necessity of the Holy Spirit in forgiveness is so significant that it merits a brief review of the facts.

- The apostles of Jesus followed Him for three years. This relationship began at the time that John was baptizing, and continued until Jesus was received from them into heaven.

- Early in their training Jesus empowered them to work miracles and cast out demons.
- Even though they could work miracles, they still didn't love one another. This is significant beyond words. Not only did they not have the power to love their enemies, they didn't even have the power to love their brethren!
- Jesus strictly forbade them from leaving Jerusalem until they received power from on high (Acts 1:4 - 8). Since they already had the power to work miracles, the power they lacked was the power to love. Remember! The fruit of the Holy Spirit is love (Gal. 5:22).
- The supernatural love which the Holy Spirit gives is the primary way that unbelievers will know that we are His disciples.
- **“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:34-35)**
- The command to love was not new. The command to love God was part of the Shema which the devout Jew recited every day (Deut. 6:5). The command to love our neighbor as ourselves was also a part of Mosaic Law (Lev. 19:18). **THE NEW ASPECT OF THIS COMMANDMENT WAS THAT WE ARE TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER IN THE SAME WAY THAT JESUS LOVED!**
- We will say more about this supernatural love later.

THE EXAMPLE OF THE CORINTHIANS

The church at Corinth was familiar with spiritual gifts. These supernatural gifts are mentioned in 1 Cor. 12:1 - 11). In fact Paul stated explicitly that **THEY DID NOT LACK IN ANY SPIRITUAL GIFT** (1 Cor. 1:7).

Even though the Corinthians did not lack in any spiritual gift, they were so worldly that Paul had to feed them with milk and not meat: Please consider: **“Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly-mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere men?”** (1 Cor 3:1-4)

Their love for human leaders seemed to be greater than their love for Christ. The situation was so sensitive that Paul did not name the men who were actually guilty of creating division, but he “applied these things” to himself and Apollos so they might learn not to go beyond what was written.

Yes! God has given gifts to build up His Body. Some gifts, however, are more important than others, and love is the most important gift of all. As you know, it is the fruit of the Spirit. Nothing should be more obvious to those who are born again: It is love that binds all of our Christian virtues into perfect unity (Col. 3:14). Even though the Corinthians came behind in no spiritual gift, they needed to understand that love is the most excellent way. Paul wrote by

inspiration: **“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” (1 Cor 13:1-13).**

THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS

Remember! Jesus commanded the apostles to love one another as He love them (Jn. 13:34). As we have already pointed out, this kind of love is supernatural and requires the ministry of the Holy Spirit to make it possible.

John 3:16 has been called the Golden Text of the Bible. Please savor again this wonderful truth: **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)**

God “giving His only begotten Son” specifically involved His death on the cross. Vs. 14, for example states that just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, the Son of Man also had to be lifted up. Vs. 15 states that everyone who believes in Jesus will have eternal life. Vs. 16 specifically explains that this is the reason God “gave” His only begotten Son.

Since we are to follow the example of Christ, perhaps 1 John 3:16 should a “Golden Text”. It goes like this: **“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.” (1 John 3:16)**

The supernatural love of Jesus should not be difficult to find, for it is the principle way that all men will know that we are His disciples.

Stephen, the first Christian martyr, died asking God to forgive the very men who were killing him (Acts 7:54 - 60.) This was the same prayer Jesus had for those who were killing Him (Lk. 23:34). It is significant to note that a young man named Saul witnessed the death of Stephen (Acts 7:58).

Saul himself would later be converted to Christ and become known as the Apostle Paul. Paul was so filled with the Spirit of Jesus that he even wished himself accursed, if only his brethren could be saved. Check it out! The Jews hated Paul and it seems that everywhere he went they were trying to kill him. This happened in Damascus, Jerusalem, Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Etc. Five times he was beaten by the Jews with 39 lashes, 3 times they beat him with rods, and once they stoned him and left him for dead (2 Cor. 11:24 - 25).

Note carefully Paul's Christlike prayer for the Jews who persecuted him: **"I speak the truth in Christ-I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit- I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen. "** (Rom 9:1-5)

EXAMPLES OF LOVE AND FORGIVENESS TODAY

There never has been a time in the history of the church that Jesus was a King without subjects, or a Shepherd without sheep. From day one until now, there have always been disciples of Christ so filled with His Spirit that they did precisely what Jesus commanded them to do. They loved their enemies, prayed for their persecutors, and did good to those who despitely used them. Here are a few examples in recent times of the kind of forgiveness Christ commanded.

FORGIVENESS IN EQUADOR - On January 8, 1956 a Stone Age jungle tribe made the front page of Life Magazine by murdering five Christian missionaries. The martyrs were: Nate Saint, Jim Elliott, Roger Youderian, Ed McCully, and Peter Fleming. The families of the martyrs refused to retaliate. Instead, Elizabeth Elliott (Jim's widow) and Rachel Saint (Nate's sister) went into the jungle and won the murderers to Christ. This amazing story has been the subject of many articles, and books, and of a recent movie "The End of the Spear". One of the converted murderers is named Mincaye. He has been lovingly accepted as "Grandpa Mincaye" by the children of Steve Saint, whose biological father he killed.

FORGIVENESS IN PANAMA - On January 31, 1993 three Christian missionaries were kidnaped by a Columbian drug cartel. The missionaries were Dave Mankins, Rick Tenenoff, and Mark Rich. During the months of their captivity they won several of their guards to Christ. On July 23, 1996 the order was given to execute the prisoners. Each was required to dig his own grave, and each told the man who killed them that he too would someday be a follower of Christ. Several years later the executioner did, in fact, receive Christ as his Savior. In 2004 he contacted Bob and Noel Rich and asked forgiveness for killing their son Mark. Bob Rich wrote back and said that his own sins caused God to allow His only begotten Son to die on the cross and added: "If I have been forgiven, how can I refuse to forgive Alberto? Praise God, we are a forgiven (and forgiving) people."

FORGIVENESS IN INDIA - In January 1999 a Christian missionary and his two small sons

were burned to death by Hindu extremists. Graham Stuart Staines had been helping the poor, and working with lepers in India since 1965. At the village of Manoharpur he and his two sons, Philip (age 9) and Timothy (age 7), were sleeping in their station wagon. Their murderers covered the vehicle with kerosene and set it on fire. Graham's widow, Gladys, without anger or hatred asked publicly that the murderers be forgiven.. In a signed affidavit she wrote: "It is far from my mind to punish the persons who were responsible for the death of my husband Graham and my two children, but it is my desire and hope thadt they would repent, and would be reformed".

FORGIVENESS IN THE U.S.A.- In October 2006 Charles Carl Roberts IV walked into an Amish schoolhouse and shot ten children, and then killed himself. Within only a few hours the Amish were speaking words of comfort to the killer's widow, and parents. Compassionate donors contributed \$4.2 million to those who grieved. Amish leaders formed a committee and gave a portion of these funds to the killer's family. When the Amish showed up en masse to the killer's funeral the man directing the service felt that he was witnessing a miracle.

WRITE YOUR OWN STORY - With the help of the Holy Spirit you can experience the miracle of forgiveness in your own life. You can actually experience the same exciting results in your own life that you can read about in the lives of others.

OVERCOMING EVIL WITH GOOD

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Rom 12:20-21)

As you know, Rome was a melting pot of races, creeds, and nationalities. Abrasive encounters are constantly experienced even within segregated parts of society. When diverse groups are integrated together in the church, the possibility of abrasive encounters is greatly enhanced. Since Jesus came to unite all the fragmented segments of society (Eph. 1:10), and since the unity of believers is a requisite to world evangelism (John 17:20 - 23), the church in Rome needed to be a pace setter and example for the whole world.

Notice how the Holy Spirit gives guidance to help these diverse groups live in harmony with one another.

- **"Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought . . ." (Rom. 12:3).**
- **"In Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others" (Rom. 12:5).**
- **"Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves" (Rom. 12:10).**
- **"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse" (Rom. 12:14).**
- **"Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited" (Rom. 12:16).**

- **“Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath.” (Rom. 12:17 - 19).**
- **“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.” (Rom 13:8-10)**
- **“Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.” (Rom 14:1)**
- **“Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.” (Rom 14:4)**
- **“why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.” (Rom 14:10)**
- **“Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.” (Rom 14:13)**
- **“ Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.” (Rom 14:19)**
- **“We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. ” (Rom 15:1-2)**
- **“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus,” (Rom 15:5)**
- **“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” (Rom 15:7)**

These are just a few samples of Paul’s teaching about unity in the body of Christ. After several chapters emphasizing the importance of all believers living in love and harmony, the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to give this warning:

“I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. ” (Rom 16:17-18)

Causing division, and creating obstacles was contrary to what Paul had been teaching. Those involved in creating divisions seem to be more interested in serving themselves, than in serving the Lord Christ.

YOU CAN DO IT!

Many who read these words are holding grudges and going to bed angry every night. You have tried to forgive, but thus far have found it impossible. Do not despair, for Christ is your key to success. In Christ all of God's servants are for you. Please note: **“So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.” (1 Cor 3:21-23)**

In Christ, you not only have access to the help of all gifted leaders in the church, but more importantly, to the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul reminded the Ephesians that this is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and exalted him to the right hand of God (Eph. 1:18 - 23). In Christ, this power is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think (Eph. 3:14 - 21).

“For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.” (Eph 3:14-21)

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