

Our Forgiving

This is a topic that I believe could resonate in one way or another with many folks who read this. It comes to us when we experience a family dispute. Sometimes family members do things to other family members that are scripturally wrong. One member of the family has sinned against the other(s), and has done so repeatedly. One or more members of the family knows that the offender must be forgiven, while another part of the family believes that the offender first needs to show some repentance before any olive branches of forgiveness are extended. So, is an apology necessary before forgiveness can be offered? This question can be answered in two ways: "No, it is not necessary" and "Yes, it is necessary."

Yes, I will elaborate. First, the answer is, "No, it is not necessary for the offending family member to repent before others in the family can forgive." When Jesus hung on the cross and He looked down upon the people who had put Him there, he saw some people who loved Him. He saw His family and friends. He also saw the Roman soldiers who were there to carry out the execution. And then He also heard and saw those people that were jeering and mocking Him. Jesus said, "Father forgive them, they don't know what they're doing."

With the exception of the centurion who said, "Surely this was the Son of God," there's nothing in the Gospels which indicate any sign of remorse or contrition from the soldiers or the ones mocking Jesus ... nothing to indicate a sudden change of heart. Even so, Jesus forgave them all. When Jesus died, He died to take away the sins of everyone, not just those who had or would repent. The sins of every human being were carried to the cross and Jesus' blood has paid the price for those sins.

Since all our sins are forgiven, everybody will then go to heaven, right? Sadly, no, that's not right. In order for that general forgiveness which Jesus won to become my forgiveness, I need to be given a few things. I need to be given faith; I need to be given a repentant heart. On the day of Pentecost, after hearing the first Christian sermon ever preached, the people asked, "What must we do to be saved?" And Peter told them, Acts 2:38 "Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins."

Jesus forgave those who crucified Him, but that forgiveness only becomes individually and specifically applicable when a person receives it in repentance and faith. That's what the Bible says. John the Baptizer had preached repentance and then forgiveness. Shortly before Jesus ascended into heaven He said in Luke 24:47, "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

How would we apply all of this to the family having a dispute with another family member? The offender should be forgiven. Forgive him or her completely and totally. You offer this forgiveness so that you don't carry the burden of anger against him or her. Understand, forgiveness doesn't mean that you let yourself be put in a situation where the offender can continue to sin against you again and again. You can forgive but still act wisely in the future. Still, for your sake you ought to forgive the offender.

But, it still remains, that forgiveness will not be of much help to the offender unless he or she repents. The offender needs to recognize the errors of what he or she has done and try to straighten out the past and not repeat it in the future. That would be repentance and could lead to restoration and reconciliation.

That's the View from Here.

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