

12 GRANTING FORGIVENESS

I am telling you what Christianity is. I did not invent it. And there, right in the middle of it, I find 'Forgive us our sins as we forgive those that sin against us.' There is no slightest suggestion that we are offered forgiveness on any other terms. It is made perfectly clear that if we do not forgive we shall not be forgiven. There are no two ways about it. What are we to do?

--C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

1. The foundation for all forgiveness is the sacrificial and substitutionary death of Christ for sinners. Without this work of Christ we would have no hope for forgiveness.

** So we praise God for the wonderful kindness he has poured out on us because we belong to his dearly loved Son. He is so rich in kindness that he purchased our freedom through the blood of his Son, and our sins are forgiven. (Eph. 1:6-7 NLT)*

** He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:13-14 NKJV)*

** Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. (Heb. 9:22 NLT)*

2. Confession is the necessary link between our sin and forgiveness. Scripture encourages us to confess our sins to God and resist the temptation to cover over those sins.

** When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD—and you forgave the guilt of my sin. (Psa. 32:3-5 (NIV)*

** If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins. He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 Jn. 1:8-9 NKJV)*

3. When others have been wronged by our sinful behavior, it is important that we confess our sin to these individuals as well as to God.

** Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. (Jas 5:16 NASB)*

** Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (Eph 4:32 NASB)*

** Bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone, just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. (Col. 3:13 NASB)*

4. Genuine repentance calls for a change of attitudes and actions in the one who has sinned.

** For God can use sorrow in our lives to help us turn away from sin and seek salvation. We will never regret that kind of sorrow. But sorrow without repentance is the kind that results in death. Just see what this godly sorrow produced in you! Such earnestness, such concern to clear yourselves, such indignation, such alarm, such longing to see me, such zeal, and such a readiness to punish the wrongdoer. You showed that you have done everything you could to make things right. (2 Cor. 7:10-11 NLT)*

** Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. (Matt 3:8 NIV)*

5. God expects us to grant forgiveness to those who profess to have repented of their sins. We do not need to wait until we see evidence of the fruit of repentance in their lives.

** 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." (Lk 17:3-4 NKJV)*

6. Once we have received God's forgiveness for our sins, we are promised that God will not continue to 'think' on them. The sins of our past are fully forgiven and will not be held against us.

** I will forgive their wickedness and will never again remember your sins. (Jerm. 31:34 NLT)*

** I—yes, I alone—am the one who blots out your sins for my own sake and will never think of them again. (Isa 43:25 NLT)*

7. If we have received Christ's forgiveness, we in turn must be willing to forgive others who have sinned against us.

** Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Eph. 4:32 NIV See also Col. 3:13)*

** And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. (Matt 6:12 NKJV)*

** I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven . . . You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.' (Matt 18:22, 32-35 (NKJV)*

8 Scripture provides models of forgiveness. The prime motivating example is that of Christ at his crucifixion.

** But Jesus was saying, 'Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.' (Lk. 23:34 NASB)*

** They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!' Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them!' Having said this, he fell asleep. (Acts 7:59-60 NASB)*

PRAYER

Father, how often I have needed to return, as the prodigal son returned, to receive your forgiveness and the forgiveness of others. Your forgiveness in my life has been a miracle of grace. Yet somehow it remains difficult for me to forgive those who have wronged me deeply. There is a sinful part of me that wants to hang on to the hurt and never let go. Lord, I pray that your Holy Spirit would transform my willfully stubborn heart and create in me a desire to forgive freely, as I have been forgiven. Thank you that the well of your mercy never runs dry.

PROMISE

"I—yes, I alone—am the one who blots out your sins for my own sake and will never think of them again. (Isa. 43:25 NLT)