

The Ultimate Goal in Resolving Conflict – Reconciliation (Part 1)

Introduction:

1. Reconciliation is the final goal when it comes to resolving conflict. To be reconciled means “to replace hostility and separation with peace and friendship.”
2. The keys to reconciliation are confession and forgiveness.
3. Because Christians are the most forgiven people in the world, we should be the most forgiving people in the world. Yet, it is often very difficult to forgive others genuinely and completely. We find ourselves practicing a form of forgiveness that is neither biblical nor healing.
4. As believers, we cannot overlook the direct relationship between God’s forgiveness and our forgiveness. Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13
5. God has given us a very high standard to live up to when we have the opportunity to forgive someone. Praise the Lord, He also gives us the power and the guidance we need to imitate Him by forgiving others as He has forgiven us.

What biblical forgiveness is NOT:

1. Forgiveness is not a feeling.
 - It is an act of the will.
 - Forgiveness involves a decision not to think or talk about what someone has done, and God calls us to make this decision regardless of our feelings.
2. Forgiveness is not forgetting.
 - Forgetting is a passive process in which a matter fades from memory merely with the passing of time.
 - Forgiving is an active process. It involves a conscious choice and a deliberate course of action.
 - **Example:** Isaiah 43:25 – When God forgives us, He chooses not to mention, recount, or think about our sins ever again.
 - Similarly, when we forgive, we must consciously decide not to think or talk about what others have done to hurt us. This may require a lot of effort, especially when an offense is still fresh in our mind. But when we do this, painful memories begin to fade.
3. Forgiveness is not excusing.
 - Forgiveness is the opposite of excusing.
 - The very fact that forgiveness is needed and granted indicates that what someone did was wrong and inexcusable.
 - Forgiveness says, “We both know that what you did was wrong and without excuse, but since God has forgiven me totally and completely, I forgive you.”
 - Forgiveness deals honestly with sin, therefore it brings a freedom that no amount of excusing could ever hope to provide.

Forgiveness is a decision.

1. Having never learned the true meaning of forgiveness, many people destroy important relationships by keeping a record of the wrongs of others. At the same time, they deprive themselves of the peace and freedom that comes through genuine forgiveness.
2. To forgive someone biblically sometimes means “to release from the liability of suffering punishment or penalty.”
 - Sometimes the word “forgive” means “to let go; release or remit; such as debts having been paid or cancelled in full.” Matthew 6:12, 18:27
 - Another meaning of forgiveness is “to bestow favor freely or unconditionally,” showing that forgiveness is undeserved and cannot be earned. Luke 7:42-43
3. As these words indicate, forgiveness can be a costly activity. When you cancel a debt, it does not simply disappear. Instead, you absorb a liability someone else deserves to pay.
 - This is what Jesus did at Calvary. He secured our forgiveness by taking on Himself the full penalty of our sins. Our forgiveness is not free – it is free to us, but Jesus had to pay our debt. Isaiah 53:4-6; 1 Peter 2:24-25
 - Remembering what He did to purchase our forgiveness should be our greatest incentive to release others from the penalties they deserve.
4. Through forgiveness, God tears down the walls that our sins have erected, and He opens the way for a renewed relationship with Him.
 - This is exactly what we must do if we are to forgive as the Lord forgives us. We must release the person who has wronged us from the penalty of being separated from us. The relationship may be different than it was previously, but nevertheless, the relationship is reconciled.
5. Forgiveness may be described as a decision to make four promises:
 - I will no longer dwell on this incident.
 - I will not bring up this incident again and use it against you.
 - I will not talk to others about this incident.
 - I will not allow this incident to stand between us or hinder our relationship.
6. By making and keeping these promises, you tear down the walls that stand between you and the other person. Now the relationship can heal, develop, and grow in a godly way.
7. When should you forgive?
 - Ideally, repentance should precede forgiveness, unless it is a minor offense and can simply be overlooked.
 - Even when an offense is too serious to overlook and the offender has not yet repented, you should make a commitment to the Lord not to dwell on the hurtful incident. This will protect you from bitterness and resentment.
 - The last three promises of forgiveness are not appropriate until the offender has made things right and the issues are resolved. If the person just doesn’t get it (he doesn’t understand what he has done), it may take some time.

8. What about the consequences?

- Forgiveness does not automatically release a wrongdoer from all the consequences of sin. Forgiveness and consequences are two completely different issues.
- **Illustration:** Remember the Israelites who rebelled in the wilderness? God forgave them, but deemed that they would die without entering the Promised Land.
- Likewise, there may be times when you forgive someone but cannot afford to absorb the consequences of their wrongdoing. Or even if you could afford it, it may not be the best thing for the offender (especially if they have a habit of irresponsibility or misconduct). Proverbs 19:19
- On the other hand, you may decide to relieve that person from at least some of the consequences of his or her sin. Genesis 50:15-21
- The important thing to remember is that once a person has expressed repentance, it is your responsibility to make the four promises of forgiveness and to remove the penalty of separation.