

A Forgiving Spirit

Forgiveness is difficult. Forgiveness is not fair. Forgiveness turns our expectations upside down. Yet, justice demands that the one who offends another, pay for his offence. Justice cries out, "An eye for an eye."

Justice demands equity, yet, equity is usually impossible. Equity demands restoration, but you simply cannot *un-ring the bell*. Even when the thief returns stolen goods, the theft still occurred. Relationships are affected; trust is broken. Justice is never completely served. In the "eye for an eye" system of justice, a second injury is demanded after the first.

When one person demands justice from another, does it ever satisfy? Does it ever truly take away the hurt and repair the damage?

We must realize that mankind is unjust. For that reason, no one has a right to demand justice (fairness) from others. In contrast, God is just and He alone can demand justice. He is just because He is by nature pure and holy.

Forgiveness often appears to be the opposite of justice. However, God is, by nature, just; and God is, by nature, forgiving. He is not schizophrenic as if His justice personality and His forgiving personality battle each other to emerge. Both are part of His nature and He is not in conflict with Himself.

When we compare ourselves to God, we realize that we are flawed and incomplete. Such reflection should affect our attitudes toward others.

We desire forgiveness from God, and we desire forgiveness from other people. Every one has fallen to sin yet desires mercy and forgiveness. Every one of us has wronged someone and yet we desire that they extend forgiveness. So, what are we really asking?

When I ask you to forgive me, it implies that I have done something to hurt you; I have committed a wrong against you. To ask forgive-

ness is to ask *you* to bear the pain that you have already endured and release me from the debt I owe. I am asking you to go on living as if the wrong had never been done.

There are three grossly unfair aspects to forgiveness.

- First, the forgiver bears the pain.
- Second, the one committing the wrong and inflicting the pain goes free.
- Third, the forgiver often appears to be the guilty one.

Jesus taught that forgiveness has no restrictions. If there is any limitation, it is found in the statement:

If you do not forgive men, your Father will not forgive your transgressions. (Matthew 6:15)

When Jesus was crucified, He asked God to forgive his murderers. In reality He asked God to place their guilt on Him. He would bear the pain; He would bear the shame; He would appear to be the criminal.

Jesus recognized that the people who crucified Him really *did not understand what they were doing*. Do not take that statement lightly. It is possible for us to capture the same true understanding about those who hurt us? *They really do not know what they are doing*. The question is whether we really know what we are doing when we refuse to forgive...and when we do forgive.

As Christians, when we are faced with a decision to forgive, we should remember that we also have been forgiven by God. It is true that nothing is fair about forgiveness! However, *when we forgive, we are more like our Savior than at any other time*.

Pursue a forgiving spirit.

Mark Stinnett