

Good morning! This week we are studying one of the most difficult things about Christianity, forgiveness. Forgiveness is hard, because it's completely counter-intuitive. We don't want to forgive people who hurt us. When we see how much we need forgiveness ourselves, we find it hard to ask for it because it is so humiliating. We can't understand how Jesus could forgive us because we know, deep in our hearts, that we are still sinners. And yet, that's just what Jesus does---He forgives us, knowing that we have not stopped sinning and will continue to sin for the rest of our lives. We have seen this week that God in Christ has forgiven us. We have also seen that He requires us to forgive others. This morning, let's consider together an aspect of forgiveness that sometimes escapes our attention---the personal benefit of forgiveness:

Be gentle and ready to forgive; never hold grudges. Remember the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.

Colossians 3:13

Let's read that last sentence again: "Remember the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others." In today's passage, Paul reminds us that Jesus has forgiven us and then he tells us that because Jesus has forgiven us we are not to withhold forgiveness from those who have hurt us. I recently read a story about a traveler who had to ford a river. When he came out of the river on the other side, he discovered that his body was covered with leeches. His first impulse was to pull them off, but his guide said, "No, don't! Part of the leech in your body will remain and that will cause infection. Wait until we arrive at our lodging." Upon their arrival, the guide prepared a warm bath for the traveler and added to the water certain herbs. As the traveler immersed himself in it, the leeches dropped off one by one. Unforgiven injuries are like those leeches, draining our lives. Keeping them drains our vitality. But trying to remove them on our own causes them to fester and poison us. Only bathing in the love and forgiveness of Jesus can cause these injuries to drop away and give us power to truly forgive others.

You and I are called to forgive for our own good. We must let go of our anger, resentment, hurt, hatred, bitterness, desire for revenge, and getting even. We must give up our right to a better past. Instead, we must forgive and move on in our relationship with God. God has told us to forgive and when we do not forgive we must see it for the sin it is. Sin always damages two people--- the victim and the sinner. When I withhold forgiveness, I withhold from myself the peace that comes from the experience of having forgiven. Do you want to move forward in your relationship with your Heavenly Father? Ask Him this morning to show you those people you have not yet forgiven for the things they have done to you. Forgive them...and be free!