

Good morning! Yesterday we began a series on the subject of forgiveness. Over the years, I have seen many Christians struggle with forgiveness, a subject which is the beating heart at the center of Christianity. People who have been hurt have a hard time forgiving those who hurt them. Other people have a hard time receiving forgiveness, either from another person or from God. All of us have a hard time believing that God forgives us as completely as He does. There must be a catch---something that we have to do in order to earn it---but amazingly, Jesus forgives us without our having paid for it! Forgiveness is a relational issue; let's consider that as we read today's passage together this morning:

Col. 3:13

Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.

In today's passage, Paul reminds us of what Jesus said in the Lord's Prayer, that God connects His forgiveness of our sins to our forgiveness of others. Let's look at some of the ways forgiveness can be experienced in our personal relationships. First Case: The sinner repents and the victim forgives. This is the best case! The sinner has made his peace with God, and, so far as possible, with his victim. The victim has allowed God to heal him and to let go of his anger, hurt, resentment, and bitterness. He can turn it over to God and let Him deal with it. These two people can become reconciled. Second Case: The sinner does not repent, but the victim forgives. In this case, the sinner remains in sin, but the victim has made peace with God. Note that the victim does not wait until the sinner repents before forgiving. It is vital for Christians to forgive others for their own spiritual health! Remember Jesus and those who crucified Him. "Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do."

Jesus showed that we can forgive, whether or not the other party accepts our forgiveness. In fact, most of the people involved in the crucifixion did not repent or accept the forgiveness Jesus offered them, choosing instead to remain in their sin. Third Case: The sinner repents, but the victim does not forgive. In this case, the sinner has found peace with God, and may be forgiven. This does not mean all of his consequences are erased, but the person who has forgiven can trust God to help him deal with them. Sadly, the victim in this case remains a victim, unable to surrender his pain and anger to Jesus and receive healing. Fourth Case: The sinner does not repent, and the victim does not forgive. This is the worst case and sadly, the most common one. No repentance from the sinner and no forgiveness from the victim. Neither person will allow God to change and heal them in their brokenness. Do you recognize yourself in one of these scenarios? What will you do about it today?