

Forgiveness



For Ourselves and Others

by Don Schmidt

Forgiveness . . .

to forgive v. 1. *To excuse for an offense; to pardon.* 2. *To renounce anger or resentment against.* 3. *To absolve from payment of.* (The American Heritage Dictionary)

As believers in Jesus Christ, we have been forgiven. God has pardoned our offense. He has turned from us His wrath. The penalty for our sin is no longer a debt for which we must pay. And all this is possible because Jesus paid a debt he did not owe, a debt that we could never repay.

Now as believers in Jesus Christ, we have been instructed to "be kind to one another,

tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:32). What a lofty command! We don't have to meditate long on God's forgiveness — that we can't earn it and we certainly don't deserve it, that it is offered with joy and without limit, and that God actually pursues us with this gift even before we've come to desire it for ourselves — we don't have to meditate long before we will recognize that this call to forgive one another as God forgave us is a call which even the most godly among us stumble over at times.

But as believers, our struggle with forgiveness isn't only over the "big

offenses" — those times when we feel violated, betrayed, or deeply wounded. There are other times when our decision to ignore a smaller infraction, rather than choosing to share with someone how their words or actions caused a wound to our relationship, will allow distance to creep in to that relationship and rob us of an opportunity for true reconciliation.

All of us can think of times when someone has done something to us (as well as those times when we've done something to someone else) that was wrong or resulted in a hurt. As we became aware of the offense, we may have thought about

approaching the other person to share this awareness, to offer an apology or to explain the impact which their words had on us. But we dismissed the thought by telling ourselves, "It really wasn't that big of a deal. I'm not sure they're even aware of what happened." This is why many relationships — whether between friends or within families — were once much closer than they are now. While there has never been a big breach in the relationship, there has been a series of small issues which have come and gone, issues that in and of themselves were not "that big of a deal," but issues which over time have chipped away at the enjoyment and

resulted in a wall of distance.

And maybe more tragic is that we've missed countless opportunities to experience and reflect God's forgiveness in our human relationships. For one of us to have said, "I know I have hurt you. Please forgive me," would have opened both our hearts to a fresh encounter with God's grace as it brings healing to the tender parts of our inner soul.

May I invite you to look at forgiveness in a new way. Begin to see it as a gift you may give in the less significant matters of life as well as in the big ones. Use the opportunities which come

your way not for the purpose of making mountains out of molehills, but for the purpose of weaving the grace of God into the very fabric of our lives. My prayer is that God's glory will be increasingly reflected on the face of this community.

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