

# Forgiveness, God's Great Gift

Forgiveness is a basic, foundational matter for God's children. The 23rd Sunday after Pentecost is "Forgiveness Sunday." Its theme contains the instruction to forgive one another. The church lectionary that lists the themes and Bible texts for each Sunday has these words about Forgiveness Sunday: "Our entire life is based upon forgiveness, which we obtain through the merits of Christ's death on the cross. It obligates us to treat our neighbor kindly, gently, and forgivingly. This kind of attitude enables God's manifold gifts to work in all their richness."

## **Freely We Have Received**

When Jesus sent His twelve disciples to take the message of God's kingdom into the world, He reminded them: "Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matt. 10:8). These words join with the above Sunday theme to teach us about the two "sides" of forgiveness—the forgiveness that we receive and the forgiveness that we offer to others.

Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians reminds us that we are saved by grace through faith and this is a gift from God (Eph. 2:8). We are God's children because He has given us the gift of faith. Through the preaching of the gospel from His kingdom, God has forgiven us our sins.

As believers, we are able to hear and believe this message of forgiveness whenever we need to hear it. Martin Luther has written that in God's kingdom, God daily and richly forgives us and all believers all sins. All of this, God gives to us freely.

## **Freely Give**

Jesus' instruction to give freely, just as we have received freely, teaches us to forgive others as God has forgiven us.

Apostle Paul wrote this instruction to the believers in Colosse, "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness" (Col. 3:12–14).

This is a text that often comes to my mind at wedding occasions. Apostle Paul's words teach us how to relate to other people. This instruction is especially good as a basis for a life that is lived together, in which two people's lives become one. It is also the basis for how we live together in our homes and families. It is good to treat one another with kindness, gentleness, and patience. It is especially important to forgive each other.

Which is easier—to freely receive forgiveness or to freely forgive others? It is not always easy to ask for forgiveness when we have done something wrong. However, it can be even more difficult to forgive and forget when someone has wronged us. It helps us to be forgiving toward others when we remember how freely we have been forgiven. "As Christ forgave you, so also do ye."

We have experienced how good it feels when our sins are forgiven. It has also felt good when we have been able to forgive others and not carry bad feelings toward them. We can pray to God that He would help us to both ask forgiveness and forgive.

## **The Gospel's Power**

Jesus gave the Holy Spirit and the power to forgive sins to His own (John 20:21–23; Matt. 16:19). Jesus also instructed His disciples about sending the message of forgiveness into the world, "Then opened he their understanding, that they

might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:45–47).

The message of the gospel is a message about the redemption work of Christ and the forgiveness that God offers to all sinners. For those who believe, the gospel is the power of God that helps us remain on the way to heaven (Rom. 1:16).

Not everyone wants to receive the loving message of the gospel. Many of us have family or friends who are dear to us, and also our neighbors, who are not in living faith. The instruction of God’s Word to be kind, gentle, and humble toward others applies to our relations with all people. Believers cannot join in the world’s sinful ways, but we want to still carry a loving and forgiving mind toward others.

In all things, even our attitude toward others, the gospel is our source of power. The gift of forgiveness is one of God’s greatest gifts. It takes away our guilt and the burden of sin. It also helps us to have a forgiving mind toward others.

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### **Discussion Suggestions:**

1. Read Genesis 50:12–21. Discuss what happened between Joseph and his brothers and the forgiving mind toward his brothers that God gave Joseph.
2. Read Genesis 13:5–16. Discuss how Abram and Lot resolved their dispute and how we should try to resolve disagreements with others.
3. Read Matthew 18:21–35. What does this teach us about forgiveness?