

Is Repentance Required for Forgiveness?

One month ago, political activist Charlie Kirk was killed in Utah. This made national headlines for various political reasons. There was a public memorial service that was televised, and his wife Erika gave a speech in which she offered forgiveness to the one that shot and killed her husband. This is a terrible situation to be sure of and thankfully, that many of us will never experience. Many people, including Christians, have praised her for offering forgiveness to the one that murdered her husband. The trouble is that the person arrested for the shooting, assuming that he is the guilty party, has not indicated at all that he is sorry or that he needs forgiveness.

The Bible teaches about the importance of forgiveness toward those who sin against us. *"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."* (Matthew 6:14-15) If we want to be forgiven by God, we must be willing to forgive others.

So, if someone sins against us, do they have to repent before we forgive them? Jesus answered this question in one verse, *"Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him."* (Luke 17:3) There is clearly a condition for forgiveness: repentance. Jesus also said, *"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother."* (Matthew 18:15) In this verse, *"tell him his fault"* and *"if he hears you"* are equivalent to *"rebuke Him"* and *"if he repents"* in Luke 17:3. In both passages, the one who sins must repent before the one sinned against is to forgive. In the Matthew 18 account, Jesus goes on in verses 16-17 to demonstrate the process if a person is unwilling to repent. Two or three witnesses are brought in, then if there's still no repentance, the matter is to be taken before the church. Where would someone get the idea that we must forgive for our own benefit, regardless of whether the guilty party repents? That idea does not come from the teaching of Jesus!

Sometimes in the discussion of this topic the words of Jesus are quoted from Luke 23:24 when He was on the cross, *"Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.'"* Some have concluded that Jesus, from the cross, forgave those who killed him without their repentance. Consider Peter's sermon just a short time later, preaching to the Jews on Pentecost. He preached a sermon about Jesus being the son of God and placed the blame on them for having crucified Him (Acts 2:22-36). They were *"cut to the heart"* (Acts 2:37) by what Peter said and asked what they should do. Peter told them they needed to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Could they not have told Peter, "We already received forgiveness from Jesus back when he was on the cross!" Although Jesus had previously said, *"Father, forgive them,"* they were still in sin because they had not met the conditions of God's forgiveness. Jesus did not mean they were forgiven without repentance, but instead, He demonstrated his willingness to forgive while on the cross. He had a forgiving spirit, but the people responsible for killing Him still had to do their part: they had to repent and be baptized (Acts 2:37-38).

Some may tell us that withholding forgiveness toward the unrepentant shows a lack of love and compassion. They look at people who would take this position as holding a grudge against the one who had sinned against them. Holding a grudge would violate God's word as well as Ephesians 4:31 states, *"Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice."* However, Ephesians 4:32 goes on, *"And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you."*

Christians are to forgive. But how? We forgive the same way God forgives us. God has always required repentance before forgiveness.

- by Josh McCord

Are There Good People In All Churches?

The statement that "there are good people in all churches" is usually made as a defense of the existence of the many different conflicting denominations. Certainly there are good people in all the churches. There are good people OUT of churches, too. There are good people who are infidels. But the question is not are they GOOD, but are they SAVED?

It is good to be good, but it is not good enough. One cannot save himself by just being good.

He must obey the gospel of Christ (2 Thess. 1:7-9) to be saved. Cornelius was a good man but he was a lost man! (Acts 10:1-6; 11:14). The good people in human churches are lost people, not because they are not good moral people, but because they have not obeyed the gospel of God. This is why we appeal to good people to leave their human churches and obey the gospel. There is no other hope for these good folks.

- by Earl Fly

Virtue

Peter instructs us that we must "add to your faith virtue" (2 Peter 1:5). What is this "virtue," and how do we manifest it?

Thayer says that virtue is a word that could be used to describe any kind of excellence in a person or thing. When used of a person, it might denote a quality of body or mind. But, when used in the ethical sense, Thayer says it specifically means "moral goodness or excellence." Another commentator suggests that it is "courage . . . a resolute determination to do what is right . . . steadfast strength of will to choose always the good part." (Caffin)

How do we demonstrate this "moral courage?" What will be the signs that we are "adding to our faith virtue?" Numerous examples can be found in the Word of God. Famous heroes of the faith displayed virtue. Noah did in the matter of living faithfully in the midst of an entirely wicked world. Abraham did when he left the comforts of home to obey God, and later when he was willing to offer his own son at God's command. Moses did when he chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Hebrews 11:25).

However, most of us will not find ourselves in the momentous situations of a Noah, Abraham or Moses. Instead, we will be faced with the constant challenges of our every day lives. It is interesting that one of the most familiar uses of this terminology is found in application to a woman. In Proverbs 31 the "virtuous woman" is described. Hers was not the work of a soldier in battle, or that of a famous prophet standing up for truth and righteousness. Instead, we read of her faithfully fulfilling her role as a wife and mother. It was her God given job, and she did it well. She was "virtuous."

Christian, will you courageously do what is right regardless of the consequences? Will you show "moral excellence" in how you talk, act, dress, etc.? Will you take your stand -- always -- with those who are faithfully doing the will of God? It will not always be popular or easy, but when you do you will be showing "virtue." Think!

- by Greg Gwin