

Community of Forgiveness

Ephesians 4:31-5:2

Scripture

³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. ^{NIV} Ephesians 5:1 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (NIV)

Main Idea

Background & Focus

Scholars see Paul's letter to the Ephesians as the letter where he most clearly unveils his theology of the church. In various ways throughout the letter, Paul explains that wherever the gospel of God's grace is at work, a community built on grace is formed.

Forgiveness assumes that when we live in community with one another we will wrong each other, misunderstand each other, and treat each other with selfishness. In short, our relationships will get broken and need fixing. Since we are sinful and imperfect people anytime we relate to each other deeply there is the possibility of relational strife.

Forgiveness is the element of community that focuses on the healing of relational conflict. We can define the forgiveness we receive from God through the gospel in this way, "The free canceling of our debt for the restoration of relationship". The gospel is the model and the means of our own forgiveness. Forgiveness breaks through the relational "debt" we create in wronging each other by pursuing the restoration of the relationship over our own rights/reputation, our need for payback, and our own fears of being hurt again.

Starters

- How do you most often handle conflict (fight or flight)? Why do we so often react in one of these two ways to our relational conflict?

Discussion

Q1: What kinds of things make you the most angry in your relationships? What is the source of our bitter thoughts, our anger and our acts of malice (def. a wicked intention to do an injury) in our relationships (4:31)?

Q2: How does 4:32-5:2 point us to the gospel as the model and the means of forgiving one another?

Q3: Author Ken Sande says, "Whenever others wrong you, you have an opportunity to introduce them to the wonderful world of forgiveness". Sounds crazy, huh? What prevents us from seeing our relational conflicts as opportunities to 'practice the gospel'?

Q4. Peacemakers ministries offers a four-fold summary of the promises of forgiveness.

1. "I will not dwell on this incident."
2. "I will not bring up this incident again and use it against you."
3. "I will not talk to others about this incident."
4. "I will not let this incident stand between us or hinder our personal relationship"

a. Which one of these is hardest for you to make when you are wronged and the offender seeks your forgiveness? Why do you think that is?

b. Which one is the most comforting for you in your relationship with God? With others, when you are the offender?

Q5: Read the article "We can't Ever Be Close Again". What is your response to this true story of forgiveness?

Prayer

If you are willing, share a relationship in your life in need of forgiveness. Either you've been wronged or you have wronged another (or they think you have wronged them). As a group, pray that the power of the gospel would be seen in the granting of forgiveness and the restoration of this relationship.