

12. FORGIVENESS AT WORK

Adams gives three specific examples of the outworking of forgiveness in order to help us "see both the importance and the practicality of forgiveness. You see how it works, how it may be taught, and how important it can be in the home and the church. You also see something of how to avoid its abuse." [Adams, 110]

1. Forgiveness and Adultery

- a. A wife (Joanne) has forgiven her husband (Walt) for an adulterous encounter after he confessed his sin and asked her forgiveness. He is eager to rebuild the marriage and is committed to do whatever is necessary. She, having forgiven, insists that she wants a divorce.
- b. The pastor is called in to counsel the couple. He endeavors in conversation to accomplish three things.
 - (1) To persuade Joanne that other Christians have faced this sort of thing successfully before her; that God will bring nothing our way that he will not help us handle, if we handle it God's way; that she will not remain under the pressures of the trial indefinitely (1 Corinthians 10:13).
 - (2) That she is incorrect in believing that she has biblical grounds for divorce, for in order to divorce she will have to "bring up" her husband's sin and "use it against him" as the basis for the divorce.
 - (3) That forgiveness is for the purpose of reconciliation and that means good faith efforts to reestablish the marriage on a firm, biblical basis.
- c. Joanne has little faith — and no desire — to pursue reconciliation, but is willing to act (even against feelings) in obedience to God's word and in dependence upon his grace and the power of the Holy Spirit.

2. Teaching Children to Forgive

- a. Should we force children to say things and make promises they don't really understand or mean? Certainly not. Let's explore how it should be done.

(1) You should teach *in the milieu* (e.g., Deut. 6 & 11) — i.e., in the course of the ordinary activities of life.

(2) Parents (school teachers, grandparents, etc.) will find that forgiveness is taught most impressively in the milieu *by example*.

"Would this not diminish a parent's or teacher's authority over them?"

The parent's goal should be to help children recognize the Bible as the ultimate standard for life and, at length, help them to judge all other authorities (including their own) by its precepts. [107]

3. Misuse and Abuse

- a. Someone brings a false accusation — either by way of outright slander or by misconstruing or "outfacing" the truth. "Lois's" accusations against "Mildred's" husband, who is innocent.

- b. The temptation is to "apologize" or ask forgiveness for the *possibility* of having sinned.

- c. Adams emphasizes that "When you ask for forgiveness, be very sure that it is out of *repentance over sin*. ... "You must never ask forgiveness for error or wrongdoing on the part of another *in order to appease [another]*." [109]

- d. Instead, "Lois" must be confronted by Mildred and her husband, in order to help bring her to a true understanding of the facts and intentions of the situation, and thereby to repentance.

- e. "The key point is *you must never use forgiveness as a gimmick*." [110]