

Loving Your Enemies

But I tell you: Love your enemies. ... If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? –Matthew 5:44, 46

Jesus instructs us to overcome our enemies, not by showing everybody how wrong they were, nor by matching their hatred with ours, but by loving them.

This brings us back to the matter of choice. Love is not what you feel. Forgiving is not doing what comes naturally. It is often said, “You can’t help what you feel.” We therefore ask, does the choice to love involve repressing or denying our feelings? No. Repression is almost never a good thing to do. But love is a conscious choice to forgive—even if you don’t feel like it! If you wait until you feel it, you probably never will forgive. You must do it because it is right, because of a choice you have made that is not based on your feelings.

The paradox in total forgiveness is that it simultaneously involves selfishness and unselfishness. It is selfish—in that you do not want to hurt yourself by holding on to bitterness. And it is unselfish in that you commit yourself to the well-being of your enemy! You could almost say that total forgiveness is both extreme selfishness and extreme unselfishness. You are looking out for your own interests when you totally forgive, but you are totally setting your offender free.

Even the non-Christian understands the benefits of forgiveness in a physical and emotional sense. This surely leaves all of us without excuse. If a non-Christian is able to forgive others, how much more should the Christian follow a lifestyle of forgiveness?

As Christians we have no choice. We forfeit our fellowship with God and blessings here below when we don’t forgive. If we

have been forgiven of all our sins—and this includes even the sins we have forgotten about—how dare we withhold this from others?

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