

Why Are So Many Christians Unwilling to Forgive?

When some Christians hear the words “forgive” or “forgiveness,” it might bring up feelings of grief, painful memories or bitterness and resentment toward others. Yet, other believers feel warmth in their hearts, followed by relief and the joy of reconciliation.

But the one thing believers who cannot find it in their hearts to forgive those who have wronged them, abused them or treated them with disrespect seem to forget is what Jesus did for them on the cross. His sacrifice was the ultimate act of forgiveness—for your sins.

“Our first command is to love—first God, then one another,” says Pastor Doug Stringer, the founder and chairman of Somebody Cares International. “One of the biggest challenges in our society today is a lack of love. This expresses itself in many ways, including the lack of civility and character displayed in our disagreements—even in the church.

“We allow our preferences to divide our families, friendships and churches. ... It is crucial that the church returns to her first love, Jesus Christ, if we are to love one another and then the lost in a way that brings healing and hope to our communities and nation.”

Throughout the Bible, God shows how much He values forgiveness. In Colossians 3:13, He instructs Christians to “forgive as the Lord forgave you,” and to “forgive them so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins” (Mark 11:25).

While some might have missed it, National Forgiveness and Happiness Day took place last Saturday, Oct. 7. Created and sponsored by Robert Moyers of the Worldwide Forgiveness

Alliance, the event is celebrated annually and it's goal is to "do the will of God each day and to love one another as God loves us," Moyers says.

The organization came up with a "Prayer of Forgiveness," which asks God to forgive others and pleads with God to provide us with the power to forgive others and help one forgive oneself.

While many people hold onto grudges and fantasize about revenge, studies have revealed that the best way to heal is to actually forgive the person who hurt you. It won't make you weak, but it will contribute to the creation of a more successful and happier you.

Bible teacher Kyle Winkler says that when you take offense and hold on to it, you are "sipping on poison."

"Romans 12 says to do all you can to live in peace," Winkler says. "The key word obviously is peace, which means to live in harmony with. I'll tell you, the older I get, the more I crave this thing called peace. I'm not perfect, but I can tell you as time has gone on, I've gotten a lot better about nipping things in the bud before they spiral out of control.

"All of this bitterness and offense can turn into hatred and all kinds of division. Living with all of that bitterness and offense, all it really does is hurt you. It's toxic to you. If you really want to live free and you really want to be used at the maximum level that God wants to you, then you have to learn how to have peace with people."

According to a 2019 Barna Research study, while most Christians have engaged in no-strings-attached forgiveness at some point in their lives, one in four practicing Christians struggle to forgive.

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Charles Washington, the pastor of Regeneration Temple Church in Raleigh, North Carolina, emphasized that forgiveness is a “posture of the heart” and mirrors the act of repentance. He likened repentance to turning away from sin, while forgiveness is a decision to let go of grudges and bitterness.

Washington’s personal experience of forgiving his father, who abandoned him when he was just eight years old, taught him the importance of having a forgiving heart. He realized that forgiveness starts with the heart and letting go of past grievances.

Washington says the decline in forgiveness among Christians can be attributed to the present “selfie generation,” where self-centeredness and the pursuit of personal gain take precedence over love and forgiveness. He stressed that societal values and the focus on self-esteem have made it harder for individuals to engage in genuine forgiveness.

Stringer says there are many scriptures about forgiveness we can turn to, including:

- “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand” (Matt. 12:25, NKJV).
- Jesus prayed to the Father, “that we all may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:21).
- “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).
- “Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matt. 22:37-39).

The need for forgiveness in America remains significant, but many Christians struggle to fully embrace forgiveness due to a changing societal landscape that prioritizes self-centeredness and personal gain.

The role of the church in fostering forgiveness is crucial, as it can provide guidance and support for individuals seeking to let go of past grievances and embrace the profound act of forgiveness, ultimately finding healing and reconciliation in the process. {eo}

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