

Christian Forgiveness

Loving Our Enemies From The Cross

“If you, O LORD, keep account of [our] sins, Lord, who can stand” (Ps 130:3)? We are all sinners and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). The first step in forgiving others, then, is being able to acknowledge that we are all broken people. Thus, it becomes a bit easier to respond to the Gospel message of forgiving and loving others. And in doing so, our wounds diminish over time as love conquers.

We have all heard it said that we must hate the sin but not the sinner...loving the sinner is the tough part, and yes, Jesus set the bar really high; Sacred Scripture calls us to forgive others unconditionally (Mt 6:14-15) and to love our enemies (Mt 5:43-44). To better understand, look to horizontal and vertical dimensions of Cross.

In the horizontal dimension of the cross of forgiving and loving ones enemies, it has been taught for decades that forgiveness doesn't mean we have to like or be friends with them (i.e. a normal human response of a wounded heart). However, if God treated us that way, we would all be consigned to hell for eternity (Only those who are God's friends will be with Him forever in heaven).

In truth, the essence of the Gospel of forgiving and loving one's enemies lies within the vertical dimension of the Cross..."Father forgive them..."

1. Love from the Cross just as Jesus loved us from the Cross

2. Pray for them (Father, forgive them...Luke 23:34; You must forgive your brother from your heart... Mt 18:35; Love [to will the good of another] your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...Mt 5:44)

3. Do good to them (treat others as you want to be treated...Mt 7:12)

4. Never give up on anyone (Jesus didn't give up on Judas, Judas gave up on Jesus; Jesus didn't give up on us either)

5. Engage (Behold, I stand at the door of your heart and knock...Rev 3:20) unless they remain hostile (i.e. "I'll kill you" or they are unrepentant, go back to #1 and repeat)

6. Look for signs of goodwill (When we sin, how do we become reconciled with God? Those are the very signs of goodwill we must look for in others)

7. If there are signs of goodwill, be open to reconciliation but proceed with ongoing discernment (trust is earned over time)

8. Have no expectations of the other person (respect their free-will)

9. Allow a friendship to develop organically (do not put up interior roadblocks to healing; rather, look for the good in them)

10. Should they fall, forgive (Mt 18:35): Go to #1 and repeat (How many times must I forgive my brother?... Mt 18:21-22. How many times has God forgiven us?)

11. We must do this with others if we expect God to do this with us (Forgive us our trespasses AS we forgive others...Mt 6:12)

12. It's God's method and way of treating us every single day. It's what Jesus did for us! In the end, we'll gain one friend for sure (God), and maybe two (our former enemy)

