

How to Forgive

Now the end of all things is near; therefore, be clear-headed and disciplined for prayer. Above all, keep your love for one another at full strength, since love covers a multitude of sins. - 1 Peter 4:7-8 HCSB

We often hear “love covers a multitude of sins” quoted as a suggestion to overlook sin. However, when taken in context, the true meaning of the verse is that if we pray for others in a disciplined and clear-headed manner and work at loving each other, many of OUR OWN sins will be covered in Hashem’s eyes. This fits very neatly with the principle of “forgiven as we forgive.”¹

So the Ransomed need to work steadily at finding ways to gently restore those who have fallen into sin. The overall process of restoration is clearly described in a topical study entitled “Church Discipline.”² Succinctly, it may entail confrontation, (hopefully) confession, the installation of measures to ensure the sin does not reoccur, and (if possible) reinstatement into ministry. The installation of measures to ensure that sin does not reoccur fits with the command “watching out...so you won’t be tempted also.”³

The Corinthian church was guilty of being too forgiving. They were allowing one of their own to have a sexual relationship with his father’s wife! Paul berated them for congratulating themselves on their supposed grace and understanding and ordered them to exercise church discipline properly.

Later, after the discipline had worked and the man’s heart was softened to repentance, Paul had to command them to take him back. He told them that once a person who has wronged others has responded positively to the necessary discipline, the Ransomed must forgive and restore them.⁴ The Corinthian church was just as slow to forgive as it was to discipline. Both are serious errors.

So forgiveness and restoration is not to be granted until repentance is shown – at the very least verbally!⁵ In the Corinthians affair, the man had already undergone church discipline and shown remorse for his sins.⁶

When we do forgive the repentant sinner, we need affirm our love toward him. We mustn’t keep bringing the matter up. We should not keep talking (to them or others) about how much it hurt us.

As soon as practicable, we should resume whatever level of friendship or at the very least cordial relations we can.⁷ The Bible doesn’t require us to be their very best friend. It didn’t require that of us in the first place before they ever sinned against us. The Bible also does not suggest that there not be any consequences. Part of dealing with the sin is making sure it never happens again using either natural or imposed consequences.

The old Liar desperately wants to divide and conquer us and when we are willing to forgive others we are actually outwitting him.⁸ We need to be as glad to restore each other to a right standing with both God and man as we are that Christ did it for us.

¹ 1 Peter 4:7-8

² Found at www.fromthebible.net

³ Galatians 6:1

⁴ 2 Corinthians 2:5-11

⁵ Luke 17:3-4

⁶ 2 Corinthians 2:7

⁷ 2 Corinthians 2:7-8

⁸ 2 Corinthians 2:10-11