

In the Apostles' Creed, we claim that we believe in "the forgiveness of sins." But sometimes, I wonder, do we really believe in the forgiveness of sins? We have read in Scripture to "love our neighbor as ourselves." Do we? Then why do we suffer under the weight of a guilty conscience instead of accepting God's free grace? If we believe in the forgiveness of sins, and loving our neighbor as ourselves, then why do we bear grudges against other people? Why do we cut them out of our lives when they hurt us, offend us, or disappoint us too many times? If we believe in loving our neighbor as ourselves, then why do we say thing like, "I may have to love her, but I don't have to like her"? Have you ever heard somebody say something like that?

We may say that we believe in loving our neighbor as ourselves, but many of us are looking for a loophole, a way to get around Jesus' command of loving our enemies and forgiving those who sin against us. We would rather write them off and run them out of our lives than to risk the attempt at reconciliation and saving the relationship. We want to set limits on our love. But Jesus tells us in our Gospel reading to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44). How do we do this?

Jesus says, if your brother sins against you, go and talk about it one-on-one, face-to-face, "between you and him alone" (Matthew 18:15). In so doing, we will love without limits and will "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32). God expects us to love other people in the same way that Jesus loves us: fully, freely, unconditionally, and without limit. And that is why the believer in Christ who does not love others may have to talk to God in prayer.

In response to God's overwhelming mercy and grace towards us, we must be willing to extend that same mercy to others. God's love is supposed to change us. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). In Christ we have been forgiven of our sins, therefore, we should be motivated by the Gospel to show that same love to others. God has forgiven each of us; and so, if we would rather bear a grudge than forgive, if we would rather harbor resentment against other people instead of reconciling with them, then we will discover that we are building a prison for ourselves. When we confess in the Creed that we believe "in the

forgiveness of sins," think about what you are saying, and ask yourself if you mean it. And when you pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," give careful answer to this: if God were to forgive and love you in the same way that you love and forgive others, how would that turn out for you?

Scripture tells us that "God show His love for us while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). "While we were still weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6). Christ died for you and me. And this is the reason we can begin to make a move towards loving others. So take a moment and consider: who is the brother or sister who has sinned against me? It may be another brother or sister in Christ. It may be your biological brother or sister. It could be your parents, your children, your boss, your husband or wife, your pastor, another church member, a teacher, a coach, a friend or neighbor. Think of who that person is. Picture that person in your mind. Speak their name silently in your heart. What chains of bitterness, anger, guilt or fear bind you to that person? What hurt or insult has gotten

in the way of your relationship? Think carefully. Now, let it go. Let it go! Turn it over to God, and let it go.

Ask God to help you love without limits; because Christ, the Blessed One, gives to all wonderful words of life; offering pardon and peace to all. Amen