

Christian Perspectives: Difficult math

As this is my final column, after contributing for many years, I decided to write about a subject that I think about often. Math.

Not the math from school.

Rather, math that, without the grace of God, is difficult to understand and even more difficult to put into practice.

Matthew 18:21-22

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me. Up to seventy times?'

Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.'

We know that Jesus did not mean that we should keep track of how often someone sins against us so that we cut off the forgiveness after 490. The instruction is that we should always be ready to forgive.

That is hard enough. Because it is more than simple calculation. It involves a continuing lifestyle of forgiveness. To refrain from seeking revenge and payback. To ask God to help us see our offender through His eyes of love and compassion.

That is hard and for me, impossible, without the power of the Holy Spirit within me.

But Jesus takes us beyond the times table. He wants us to consider algebra.

If you are rolling your eyes right now I implore you to stay with me. I'll explain what I mean.

Jesus tells us that as we forgive others, so God will forgive us. The implication is that God wants us to forgive as He forgives.

Which brings us to the transitive property.

If $a = b$

And $b = c$

Then $a = c$

Let us apply this to forgiveness.

Scripture tells us that God remembers sin no more.

As God forgives = How we should forgive.

As God forgives = He remembers sin no more.

How we should forgive = We should remember sin no more.

I have clear memories from age four. I remember many things that still make me smile but I also remember (in detail) some of the times when I was deeply hurt or injured in some way.

This creates a problem if you tell me I need to 'forget'.

Consider this example:

The weather forecast calls for pouring rain. When we leave work and start our walk to the bus stop, we are upset that we forgot our umbrella. We made a mistake and now we are drenched. We forgot. Is that the kind of forgetting that forgiveness demands?

Have we only forgiven when the injury has slipped out of our mind by accident? Not at all. That may happen with slight injuries that occur from day to day. But for the deepest hurts we need to consider forgiveness as a deliberate choice not an involuntary lapse.

Forgiveness is the decision to put something out of our mind and refuse to bring it up against someone. And that is something that we might need to do over and over and over again for the same transgression.

The proof of forgiveness is not in our lack of memory. It is what we choose to do with our memories.

This is a lifestyle of grace for which we must rely on God's leading.

It is not 'forgive and do not remember.'

It is 'when you remember, forgive.'

Thanks to all of you who have reached out to me over the years when a column I have written has touched your hearts. That has meant a lot to me. As always, I invite you to contact me if there is anything you want to say or questions you want to ask about this column.

God bless you all!

Rev. Barbara Moulton