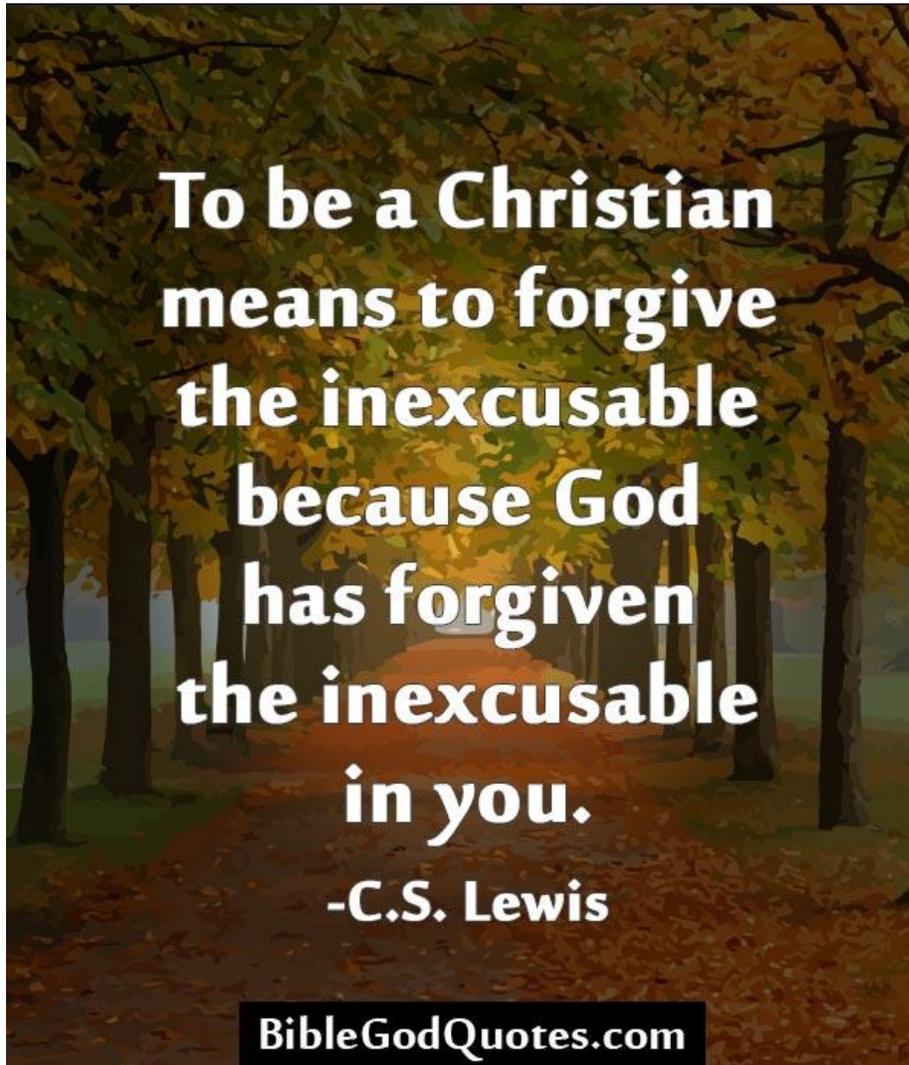


Daily Life with Christ. Love-23: Understanding the objective, universal, unchanging, eternal nature of love: Unilateral forgiveness.



(Pdf copy at <http://www.fbcweb.org/Doctrines/032918.pdf>; for background and complete series, see <http://www.fbcweb.org/doctrines.html>).

(Note Bene: The only way the phrase in the above picture “to be a Christian” can be accurate is in the sense of “to be a Christian in practice, to act like a Christian.” For one only becomes a true Christian ontologically by faith in Christ).

George: But doesn't a wrongdoer, someone who has grievously wronged you, need to repent before you can forgive him?

Stephen: No, because true forgiveness is based on the two interrelated desires of true love. Recall that true love always includes two interdependent desires (1) seeking the good of the object and (2) seeking union with the object according to the proper office.

George: Are you saying that forgiveness should be granted unilaterally? . . . regardless of the offender's attitude? . . . that the perpetrator of evil does not even need to repent? How can one forgive his enemy while the enemy continues to hate him? Doesn't forgiveness require reconciliation with the offender?

Stephen: If forgiveness required reconciliation, what about those who have harmed you and who have since died? For example, in my case my father—he was physically and psychologically abusive to my mother and me. He is now dead. Do I not have the power to unilaterally forgive him even though reconciliation is now impossible?

George: But God does not forgive apart repentance. Are we not to forgive as God forgives?

Stephen: But God does unilaterally forgive all men even though such forgiveness alone does not save anyone. For example, God forgives wrongdoers unilaterally in the sense that desires the good for them and union with them. Their attitudes, their rejection of Him, do not change God's unilateral desire for their good and union with them.

George: If God forgives everyone, then everyone is saved regardless if they accept Christ or not.

Stephen: No, because God's desires alone are unavailing to produce what is desired. For that, the wrongdoer has to be willing to accept God's forgiveness. God can forgive all, but each has to be willing to accept His forgiveness, otherwise there is no reconciliation. In the same way, I can forgive someone who hates me; I can love someone (seek his good and seek appropriate union with him in God, for example, as a fellow believer) who hates me, but as long as the person hates me, he will not be willing to be reconciled with me. However, this should not affect my forgiveness and love for him. Is this not precisely the nature of God's love? Does God not love the entire world, John 3:16? Did Christ not die for the sins of the elect as well as those who would reject Him, 1 John 2:2? Isn't Christ the Lamb who unilaterally takes away the sin of the whole world, John 1:29? Were we not enemies of God when God saved us, Rom. 5:10? Is God's love not unilateral and unconditional and not dependent upon us, 1 John 4:10? Does not the Bible teach that nothing can separate us from the love of God, Romans 8:38-39? Seems like such a love necessarily includes unilateral forgiveness. How can any being love without forgiveness? Lack of forgiveness always undermines love in that it neither seeks the good of the offender or wants to have anything to do with the offender. Aren't we glad that God does not have that kind of attitude toward us? He is always seeking our highest good (which is always in Him and the things of God) and union with us (fellowship). He is a God of unilateral love and forgiveness—all because of His matchless grace. The issue for man is the acceptance of His forgiving love by faith alone apart from works (Rom. 3:28; 4:6).