

'The hollow and deceptive philosophies' Colossians 2:9-23

In his letter to the church in Colosse Paul outlines eight 'hollow and deceptive philosophies' that are developing or have already developed. The same eight 'hollow and deceptive philosophies' were alive and kicking in Ephesus!

	The hollow and deceptive philosophies'	Colossians Reference	Paul's Answer
1	One must adhere to human wisdom, tradition, and philosophies	2:8-10 2:4 3:15-17	By themselves, these can be misleading and shallow because they have human origin; instead God's word should be our ultimate authority
2	Christ could not be both human and divine	2:9-15 1:15-20 2:2-3	Jesus was both fully human and fully divine.
3	It is even better to combine aspects of several religions (syncretism)	2:10	Christ is all sufficient
4	One must follow ceremonies, rituals, and restrictions in order to be saved or perfected	2:11 2:16-23 3:11	Christ is all we need to be saved
5	One must obtain 'secret knowledge' in order to be saved or perfected (gnosticism) – and this was not available to everyone	2:18 2:2	God's secret is Christ, and he has been revealed to all
6	Spirit is good, matter is evil	1:15-20	God created heaven and earth for his glory
7	One must deny the body and live a life of strict abstinence from worldly pleasures (asceticism)	2:20-23	Living a life like this can lead to pride and is no answer to conquering evil thoughts and desires
8	There is nothing wrong with immorality	3:1-11	We need to get rid of sin and evil because we have been chosen by God to live a new life as a representative of the Lord Jesus

Matthew Street 6th August 2017



The Parish of Foxcote with Shoscombe

Ephesians 4:32 - Forgive one another

Passage, Talk Notes and Questions

Please feel free to take these talk notes home with you and you may wish to find some time during this week to consider the questions below.

1. Talk Passage – Ephesians 4:32

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

2. Talk Notes

2.1 Introduction

- Paul encourages the Ephesian Christians, 'and by inference us, to 'forgive others as Christ has forgiven you' What a challenge for them and us.
- Paul wrote this letter whilst he was under house arrest in Rome between 60-62AD: 'For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles' (Ephesians 3:1). He had founded the church in 53AD at the end of his Second Missionary Journey and returned to stay in Ephesus for three years at the start of his Third Missionary Journey in 54AD.
- Ephesus was the New York of its day:
 - Not the capital city of the Roman Empire, but the capital city of its Asian conquests.
 - With a population of circa 80,000 (the size of modern day Bath) it was slightly smaller than Alexandria which was on one end of an all important trade route that moved grain from Egypt to Rome via Ephesus.
 - It was home to one of the seven wonders of the ancient world: The Temple of Diana.
 - It was a melting pot for religious beliefs: Greek Gods and Mythology, Roman Gods and Mythology, The cult of Diana, Emperor Worship, Spiritism, Syncretism, Gnosticism, Asceticism as well as Judaism and Christianity. (*see back page for further details*)
- If the Ephesian Christians were going to 'be distinctive' then Paul knew that they would have to demonstrate forgiveness.
- Paul knew that every Christian listening to his letter being read out then, and every Christian today, would at some point have experienced being on the receiving end of being hurt, offended, misunderstood, lied to, and rejected.
- Forgiveness is how we respond to such actions. A definition for forgiveness could be: giving up my right to hurt you, for hurting me.
- The word "forgive" means to wipe the slate clean, to pardon, to cancel a debt. When we wrong someone, we seek his or her forgiveness in order for the relationship to be restored. It is important to remember that forgiveness is not granted because a person deserves to be forgiven. Instead, it is an act of love, mercy, and grace.
- So let us consider two questions:
 1. Why are we encouraged to forgive?
 2. What might be four steps that we could take towards forgiving others who have wronged us?

2.2 Why are we encouraged to forgive

2.2.1 The Bible exhorts us to forgive.

The word *forgive* is used no less than 63 times in the Bible and there are numerous passages encouraging us to forgive others. Please see below 20 of the most striking:

Colossians 3:13	Ephesians 4:31-32	Acts 3:19	Ephesians 1:7
Matthew 6:14-15	1 John 1:9	Isaiah 1:18	Hebrews 10:17
Luke 17:3-4	Isaiah 43:25-26	2 Corinthians 5:17	Daniel 9:9

Colossians 1:13-14

Numbers 14:19-21

Micah 7:18-19

Mark 11:25

Psalms 103:12

Matthew 6:9-15

Matthew 26:28

2.2.2 We forgive because we have been forgiven by God (Ephesians 4:32)

- Jesus never expects us to do anything that he has not already modelled himself. We are encouraged to forgive others because Christ has forgiven us: *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.* (Ephesians 4:32)

2.2.3 We forgive in obedience to God (Matthew 6:14-15)

- Forgiving others may seem to be a choice, and in one sense it is a choice, but God has been very clear about forgiveness. He has given us specific direction in numerous Scriptures, all of which can be summed up in just one word -- forgive!
- Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount reminds his listeners: *“For if you, forgive men, when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵But if you do not, forgive, men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.* (Matthew 6:14-15).

2.2.4 We forgive others to gain control of our lives from hurt emotions (2 Corinthians 2:10-11).

- God is saying that it is in *our* own best interest to forgive! He is not talking about what is in the best interest of the person who needs to be forgiven. We are the ones who God is trying to protect. We are the ones who receive the most benefit from forgiveness, not the other person. A spirit of unforgiveness complicates and compromises our daily walk with God.
- Forgiving others releases us from anger and allows us to receive the healing we need. The whole reason God has given us this specific direction is because He does not want anything to stand between us and Him. God's love for us is beyond our comprehension. Forgiving others *saves* us from the consequences of living out of an unforgiving heart.
- Paul makes this point very clear to the church in Corinth: *“If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven if there was anything to forgive I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, ¹⁴in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.* (2 Corinthians 2:10-11)

2.2.5 We forgive so we won't become bitter and defile those around us (Hebrews 12:14-15).

- An unforgiving heart robs us of the full life that God intends for us. Rather than promote justice, our unforgiving heart festers into bitterness: *“Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. ¹⁵See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.”* (Hebrews 12:14-15)
- There will be times when we don't feel like forgiving those who have wronged us. It is easier to act our way into feeling than to feel our way into acting. Having a nature of not forgiving others brings about bitterness, and bitterness has been linked to stress-related illnesses by some medical researchers. By forgiving others, we free ourselves spiritually and emotionally. Forgiveness is an act of our own personal will in obedience and submission to God's will, trusting God to bring emotional healing.

2.3 What might be four steps that we could take towards forgiving others?

Four 'R's might help

2.3.1 RECOGNISE that no-one is perfect (Romans 3:23)

- We need to remember Paul's words to the church in Rome: *‘for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God’* (Romans 3:23)
- We may be feeling hurt, offended, misunderstood, lied to, or rejected today by someone else, but we equally, will have at some point in our lives, hurt, offended, misunderstood, lied to, or rejected someone ourselves.

2.3.2 RELINQUISH our right to get even (Romans 12:19)

- We need to remember that those who have sinned against us – whom we may not want to forgive – are themselves held accountable by God: *“Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord.* (Romans 12:19) and *‘For we know him who said, It is mine to avenge; I will repay, and again, The Lord will judge his people.’* (Hebrews 10:30).
- It is important to recognise that to forgive is not to downplay a wrongdoing or necessarily to reconcile. When we choose to forgive, we release a person from his indebtedness to us. We relinquish the right to seek personal revenge. We choose to say we will not hold his wrongdoing against him.
- However, we do not necessarily allow that person back into our trust or even fully release that person from the consequences of his sin. We are told that *“the wages of sin is death”* (Romans 6:23). While God's forgiveness relieves us from eternal death, it does not always release us from the death-like consequences of sin (such as a broken relationship or the penalty provided by the justice system).
- Forgiveness does not mean we act as if no wrong has been done; it does mean we recognise that grace abundant has been given to us and that we have no right to hold someone else's wrongdoing over his head.

2.3.3 RESPOND to evil with good (1 Corinthians 13:5)

- ‘Agape’ love, Paul reminds the church family in Corinth, *‘keeps no record of wrongs’* (1 Corinthians 13:5).
- As Christians we need to *‘be distinctive’* responding to evil with good.

2.3.4 REFOCUS on God's plan for our lives (Jeremiah 29:11)

- Let us remember what God has promised each one of us individually: *“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”* (Jeremiah 29:11)
- Let God deal with the sin committed against us and with the sinner, let us forgive and refocus on God's plans for our lives.

2.4 Conclusion

- Paul's encouragement to ‘forgive others as Christ has forgiven you’ is not easy to follow. Our natural inclination is to seek redress for the wrong that has been committed. But God instructs us to *‘be distinctive’* by RECOGNISING that we are not perfect, by RELINQUISHING our right to get even, by RESPONDING to evil with good and by REFOCUSING on God's plans for our lives.
- We may need to pray as follows: ‘Dear God, I choose as an act of my will, regardless of my feelings, to forgive the person who has wronged me. I release them, and I set myself free to Your healing. With Your help, I will no longer dwell on the situation or continue to talk about it. I thank You for forgiving me as I have forgiven them. I thank You for releasing me. I ask this in Jesus' name, amen.’

3. Questions to consider at home

- 1) *“For if you, forgive men, when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵But if you do not, forgive, men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.* Why did Jesus say this?
- 2) Can you think of any Biblical characters who model forgiveness to us?
- 3) When we forgive, do we act as if no wrong has been done?
- 4) *‘Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.’* (Colossians 3:13) Does this accurately describe your church?
- 5) A friend of yours tells you ‘that she could never forgive her father for things he had done to her’. How would you respond?