

Word Notes Sunday 23/03/14

Tony Hodge: Forgiveness

Summary (read this bit out to remind cell members what was said on Sunday)

Key Text: 1 John 1:5-2:2

Having talked recently about temptation and sin and the good news of salvation it seems right to talk about forgiveness. This letter is from John, the disciple who Jesus loved, the one who wrote his gospel about Jesus as being God's love letter to us. In this letter to believers John wants to reassure us of the truth and keep us on the right way – talking again about love and obedience but also about forgiveness when we fall.

John opens by reminding us of Jesus the light of the world in whom there is no darkness – how can any of us approach such a man, such a God? This question goes right back to the Garden – when Adam and Eve had disobeyed God, deciding they knew best, they realised just who they were – to be naked is not about sex here but about being seen for who they were. The result as scripture reminds us is "The wages of Sin is death" and while they did not die immediately, animals were killed to clothe them – to cover over their state of sinfulness. This led to the system of sacrifices given to Israel to deal with sins – but even that was not enough for them or for God – He wanted to forgive more fully and "remember their Sins no more". The ultimate sacrifice Jesus made of his own free will in obedience to Father God was what won any who will acknowledge Jesus as saviour and Lord true forgiveness. This is why we must address the issues of sin, repentance and forgiveness when leading someone to the Lord.

But forgiveness doesn't end there – we too are called to forgive others when asking God to "forgive us as we forgive others". Peter's question to Jesus of "how many times should I forgive my brother" shows us that even while walking with Jesus this was a challenge. Jesus' answer is clear – that we should always continue to forgive - but I'm sure we've all found that hard if not near impossible at one time or another. How do we forgive someone who has abused us horrifically, or someone we see as responsible for the death of a loved one? Thankfully not all of us face this but in considering the question we must be able to talk to someone in such a situation without sounding trite, without trivialising their hurt and anguish and not to judge anyone whose response in anger is to refuse to forgive.

It's said that "The weak can never forgive, forgiveness is the attribute of the strong" (Ghandi) but we know that strength to forgive in even the deepest of hurts comes from God not from ourselves. Jesus is the prime example ("Forgive them for they don't know what they do") and his call to follow includes forgiving too. Even in the midst of deep grief or hurt, forgiveness is possible in God's strength, not mine, and because of a higher imperative than just my needs – to honour the greater forgiveness we have received from God through Jesus and to release the flow of forgiveness in place of bitterness and anger in ourselves.

Application (this is the bit where cell members get to participate. Lead discussions around these points)

If forgiveness of our rebellion against God were easy it wouldn't have cost Jesus everything to gain it, so we shouldn't make light of another's difficulty to forgive. Discuss the following:

- In what situations do **you** find forgiveness a challenge? Is this in line with Jesus' actions in giving himself for our sin?
- What can we do to find forgiveness in our hearts when it's not easy?

Read Luke 11:4 and John 21:15-19 and discuss: Is the forgiveness we receive in some way proportionate to one of: a) our sin; b) our readiness to forgive; c) both or d) "neither it's just grace". Give reasons for your answer from the texts or from other parts of scripture.

How does your answer influence your own attitude to forgiveness?

Witness (this is the bit where the cell talks and prays about how to share the Good News)

How might our example of forgiveness demonstrate the grace of God at work in our lives? How can that be a witness.