Seeking Forgiveness From Others

“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.” (Rom. 14:19)

1. God commands us to seek forgiveness.

“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.” (Matt. 5:23,24)

“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” (Rom. 12:18)

a. The command to seek forgiveness provides:

i. An opportunity to exchange mutual hostility for mutual concession

ii. An opportunity for God and the offender to begin rebuilding or to form a relationship with the offended party

b. The call to seek forgiveness is not based on your feelings or circumstances—how the person you offended may have sinned against or hurt you

2. God explains reconciliation.

a. To whom are you to be reconciled?

i. Everyone (Rom. 12:18)

ii. Anyone you have sinned against (Matt. 5:23,24)

b. When are you to be reconciled? (Matt. 5:23,24)

i. Immediately
ii. Before you seek further fellowship with God through prayer, worship, giving or service

iii. When you are aware that you sinned against another person

iv. When you notice that someone seems to be holding something against you, even though you may not know what the problem is

c. What steps are involved in preparing for reconciliation?

i. When you are aware of your sin against another:

1. Commit to obey God’s command. Seeking forgiveness can be very humbling, but God will give you the necessary grace. (1 Pet. 5:5b)

2. Forgive the person in prayer, if he offended you, before seeking his forgiveness. (Mark 11:25)

3. Confess to God in prayer the sins you have committed against the offended and God. (1 John 1:9)

4. Confess to the Lord any fears you may have in regard to seeking forgiveness.

5. Renew your mind with thoughts of God’s ability to take you through the act of seeking reconciliation with His strength and grace. (Phil. 4:13; 2 Cor. 12:9)

6. Remember your goal is to take responsibility for your own sin rather than to try and make the other person aware of his sin against you, even if yours seem minor in comparison.

ii. When you are not aware of how you have sinned against another, but he/she seems to hold something against you:

1. Forgive the person in prayer before God for withdrawal, aloofness or anger, if these attitudes or behaviors are present.

2. State that you have noticed a change in the relationship or that he/she seems or appears to be upset with you (or whatever you have observed).
3. Ask if you have done anything to offend him/her.

4. Seek forgiveness if there is validity to his/her response. If you believe his observations are not valid, explain your viewpoint as briefly as possible to avoid a defensive attitude. (Prov. 10:19)

d. How are you to be reconciled?

i. The wrong approach is to say, “I’m sorry.”

1. It simply states feelings. Therefore, it is incomplete.

2. It demands nothing from the offended person because no response is required. Since there is no exchange, there is no assurance of reconciliation.

ii. The biblical approach is to ask, “Will you forgive me for (specific sin)?”

1. This requires a response of the offended party, presenting the opportunity for reconciliation.

2. This assures that both parties know where they stand after the question has been asked.

iii. This biblical approach does not permit justifying your sinful initiatives or responses when seeking forgiveness.

“...All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’” (1 Pet. 5:5)

“I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free.” (Ps. 119:32)