

Dear Chris,

Thank you for writing us at Christian Questions Radio. You stated that a Christian is supposed to rebuke sin with the word of God. However, Jesus said to forgive 70 times 7. You wanted to know how one might rebuke sin and forgive at the same time, especially when the sinner continues in the behavior that was rebuked.

We must first distinguish between God's forgiveness and our forgiveness. God forgives the sinner's actual sin if that sinner asks God to do so and is repentant. We can only forgive the sinner's offense toward us even though that sinner continues in the same offense. We have nothing to do with the sinner's absolution. We will first look at God's forgiveness as opposed to ours.

There are many scriptures that indicate that God forgives all manner of sin and shows mercy to the sinner. "Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'-and you forgave the guilt of my sin." (Psalm 32:5) "If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O LORD, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared." (Psalm 130:3-4) "Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon." (Isaiah 55:7)

The above scriptures are clear that God forgives provided the sinner is repentant. Repentance means changing one's mind and actions for the better. Without a positive change of direction, there is no real repentance and, therefore, no forgiveness by God. However, if there is real repentance and God has forgiven the sinner, there are still consequences for the sin. These consequences are necessary for learning to take place. One story of betrayal and forgiveness is found in Matthew 26:69-75 and John 21:15-19. It begins with Peter denying Jesus three times and ends with Jesus reinstating Peter when he asks Peter three times, "Do you love me?" Each time he tells Peter to "feed my sheep" thereby canceling out the sin by the action of telling Peter to do now what he was called to do. This is a beautiful story that illustrates the cost of forgiveness and the importance of fixing what we broke.

What about forgiving those who have offended us and continue to offend us? How do we rebuke sin and forgive at the same time? The scriptures tell us that we should and need to forgive, whether the offender is repentant or not. "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." (Matthew 6:14-15) "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven." (Luke 6:37) Although we hate the sin and have an obligation to bring that sin to the attention of the offender, we do not hate the sinner. We rebuke the sin by our example. We Christians are following in the path of our Master.

His advice to us is as follows: “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That you may be children of your Father which is in heaven:” (Matthew 5:44-45)

How thankful we are that God is the ultimate judge of each of us! We hope we have answered your question. Be sure to sign up for CQ Rewind at www.christianquestions.net. The service is free without obligation and will provide you with scriptural perspective on many questions and topics.

Sincerely,

Christian Questions Radio