



Reflections

October 2015 – *Forgiving in Difficult Situations*

In July 1963, near the end of his life, C.S. Lewis wrote a letter to a lady in Washington, DC who was in a situation where, as Lewis put, she faced “as difficult a job in the forgiving line as can well be imagined.” As part of his letter, Lewis recounted a very personal story about his own efforts at forgiving someone who had done him great wrong:

Do you know, only a few weeks ago I realised suddenly that I at last had forgiven the cruel schoolmaster who so darkened my childhood. I’d been trying to do it for years: and like you, each time I thought I’d done it, I found, after a week or so it all had to be attempted over again. But this time I feel sure it is the real thing. And (like learning to swim or to ride a bicycle) the moment it does happen it seems so easy and you wonder why on earth you didn’t do it years ago. So the parable of the unjust judge comes true, and what has been vainly asked for years can suddenly be granted. I also get a quite new feeling about ‘If you forgive you will be forgiven.’ I don’t believe it is, as it sounds, a bargain. The forgiving and the being forgiven are really the [very] same thing. But one is safe as long as one keeps on trying.¹



Lewis well understood the importance, indeed the necessity of forgiving others. In his essay “On Forgiveness,” written in 1947,² Lewis had stated:

We believe that God forgives us our sins; but also that He will not do so unless we forgive other people their sins against us. There is no doubt about the second part of this statement. It is in the Lord’s Prayer; was emphatically stated by our Lord. If you don’t forgive you will not be forgiven. No part of His teaching is clearer, and there are no exceptions to it.³

Even when we understand the importance of forgiving others, it can sometimes be very hard, and especially in difficult situations, may require repeated efforts and much prayer. As Lewis recounted in his letter, it literally took him years before he succeeded in forgiving his cruel schoolmaster. Is there anyone you need to forgive, perhaps in a situation where forgiveness is very hard? In such a situation, it may be helpful to remember Lewis’s example and his advice to keep on trying. It may also be helpful to seek prayer and counsel from a godly pastor or elder.

...for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

PHILIPPIANS 2:13 (ESV)

¹C.S. Lewis, *Collected Letters, vol. III, Narnia, Cambridge and Joy, 1950-1963*, edited by Walter Hooper, (HarperCollins London, 2006), p. 1438.

²The essay was not published until 1975. C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, Introduction by Walter Hooper (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001), pp. 20-21.

³C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001), p. 178.