Must we forgive all people?

The following is an email correspondence with a sister in Christ.

Must we forgive ALL people? Or do we forgive brothers and sisters in Christ? People who keep beating us down over and over again?

Thanks

A Sister in Christ

Response:

Hello (Sister),

I've had similar questions before. The short answer is yes to all of your questions, especially with those who keep beating us down.

Now for the doctrinal reason behind this. Ephesians 4:31-32 says "Let all bitterness, wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

Forgiveness is cancelling a debt, and waiving our right to get even or make another pay for the wrong they have done. Like Romans 4:7-8 describes, forgiveness is to "not impute sin."
Now all the passages on forgiveness in Paul's epistles are communicated in the context of one believer to another, and my question in the past has been—"What about unbelievers who don't have God's forgiveness imputed to them? Can we or do we forgive them the same?"
There are two things for us to consider in all this.

First, Ephesians 4:32 does not say "forgive as God has forgiven them...", but it does say "forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven YOU."

In other words, we can forgive because we have been forgiven, not because they have received forgiveness. I can choose to forgive freely, even the unbeliever, and send the offense to God for him to deal with. When a brother in the Lord offends me, I can send the offense to God and Calvary deals with it. When a lost man offends me, I send the offense to God, exercise forbearance and longsuffering, and either they will trust Christ as their Savior, or they will pay for their own sin and offense in Hell.
Like Romans 12:19-21 says: "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

It is also important to understand and remember what forgiveness is and what it is not. Forgiveness is not enablement, it is not reconciliation, restoration, re-defining bad behavior, making excuses, or saying the offense was not wrong (it was wrong). Forgiveness is simply not imputing their sin to them. I am waiving my right to collect payment. Forgiveness is freedom. This leads into the second point to consider, especially with those who seem to keep beating us down, and it is this: If I don't forgive, then what is my alternative? See, the failure to implement Ephesians 4:32 will lead to a life full of attitudes and actions described in Ephesians 4:31 - "...all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking... with all malice." I will be overcome of evil, instead of overcoming evil with good, in this case the good of forgiveness.

I know I am going through the motions of explaining matters you are well aware of, but hopefully the thought process helps answer the questions. Let me know if there is anything I can clarify.

In Christ,
Charlie
1Cor 15:58