



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Articles

AN OBSERVATION ON FORGIVENESS

David Anguish

In a sermon several years ago, a preaching colleague read Ephesians 4:32, where Paul said, “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, *forgiving* one another, as God in Christ *forgave* you” (ESV). Following along in my Greek text, I was puzzled. The word for “forgive” I remembered from Greek vocabulary (*aphiēmi*) is not in verse 32.

Instead, the verb *charizomai* is used. I recognized that word, or at least its noun form. Paul had used it in Ephesians 2:8: “For by *grace* (*charis*) you have been saved through faith.”

Like many English words, Greek words often have a range of meanings. According to Frederick Danker’s *Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, *aphiēmi*, which appears 143 times in the New Testament, could mean the release of someone from another’s presence, as in a “divorce” (1 Cor. 7:11-13), or the release from an obligation, whether an offense (Matt. 6:12) or monetary debt (Matt. 18:27). It could also mean “to let remain behind,” whether to leave, as when the devil left Jesus after the wilderness temptations (Matt. 4:11), to leave something behind for another’s benefit (John 14:27), or to leave someone standing (Matt. 4:20). It also had a “permissive sense, let, let go, allow, tolerate,” as in the advice Gamaliel gave the Jewish Council about the apostles (Acts 5:38) (Danker, 64).

Charizomai is used just 23 times, all in Luke (3 times), Acts (4), and Paul (16). It also has more than one meaning. It could mean to do a favor, such as healing (Luke 17:21), handing over someone for trial (Acts 3:14; 25:11, 16), or granting various benefits that display good will (1 Cor. 2:12; Gal. 3:18; Phil. 2:9). Alternately, it could refer to discharging another from an obligation, whether financial (Luke 7:42-43), or of liability for an offense (Rom. 8:32; 2 Cor. 2:7, 10; 12:13; Eph. 4:32; Col. 2:13; 3:13) (Danker, 380-381).

Since *charizomai* appears only in the writings of Luke and Paul, it is of interest to compare how those writings use *aphiēmi* (34 times in Luke and Acts; 5 times in Paul).

Luke used *aphiēmi* with other meanings (see Luke 4:39; 5:11), but did sometimes use it in the sense of forgiveness (Luke 5:20; 11:4; Acts 8:22). Paul never used *aphiēmi* to mean forgive (see Rom. 1:27; 4:7; 1 Cor. 7:11-13).

Here's my observation. We often struggle, not to define forgiveness, but to see and practice what it means to actually forgive. Yes, it entails "sending away" an offense and "leaving it behind" (*aphiēmi*). But, we struggle to forgive, first, because it's easier to talk about than do, but also, I suspect, because of the debt idea associated with *aphiēmi*. It just doesn't seem fair.

News flash: it's *not* fair! As Paul stressed by using *charizomai*, to forgive means to give grace to another just as God gave grace to us (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13). We remain grateful God didn't treat us fairly, but decided to let us off the hook. And that's what it means for us to forgive someone else.

January 24, 2017
www.davidanguish.com