

FORGIVENESS

READ: Matthew 18:21-35 (Parable of the unforgiving servant)

Matthew 18: 21, 22

1.) The attitude of the 'natural man' concerning forgiveness?

Matthew 5:43----our attitude is often, "You love me and I will love you. You do something bad to me, I will not love you (and I may even wish something bad would happen to you."

2.) What should be the attitude of the child of God concerning forgiveness?

Proverbs 24:17; Proverbs 25:21, 22----has someone 'done something to you' and then when they stumbled you thought "They just got what they deserved"? Scripture tells us 'rejoice not when thine enemy faileth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth.' Prayer for the person who has wronged us does not mean to ask God to do unto them as they have done unto you. I remember a few years ago when I was working with some people who caused me much distress. One day I asked my pastor (although I knew the answer he would give!!), "Would it be OK if I asked God to do something to them?" (Notice I did not say 'for them', but 'to them'!!) Of course, he said, "no". And, I understood that, but my feelings at the moment were not leaning toward doing anything good.

Rather, as Proverbs 25 tell us, we should be kind to our enemy. Give them food, drink, and 'heap coals of fire upon his head'. Wow!! OK, that last part might not be too hard, Lord. I'll be glad for fire to rain down on their head----but wait, to heap coals of fire upon someone's head was a way of helping them, an act of kindness. There are a few different meanings attached to the 'coals of fire' mentioned here. But, each of them has the idea of doing something good, not evil, for someone else. One of the meanings gives the explanation of an Oriental tradition. At the center of a village, a fire was burning day and night. A village youth would put a container on his head, and some of the hot coals would be heaped into it. These coals would then be distributed to the villagers to start their home fires. (And, on a cold day, the coals would also keep the youth warmer.) Another explanation given by Matthew Henry is that the 'coals of fire' would "melt him (the enemy) into repentance and friendship..." With either of the explanations, it seems that the old saying is true...The easiest way to get rid of an enemy is to make him/her your friend.

3.) Why is it impossible for a person to be saved when he refuses to forgive another who has wronged him?

Forgiveness must be applied and practical.
An unforgiving spirit (heart):

a.) brings condemnation----(disapproval; pronouncement of guilt);
Matthew 18:34, 35; James 2:13. The danger of not forgiving? Those who
show NO mercy shall receive NO mercy.

b.) prevents faithful service----prevent: to render impossible; faithful: firm
in adhering to promises, vows, true in affection or allegiance; service:
performance

c.) hinders the flow of God's power----Mark 11:24-26; Matthew 5:23, 24.
Take note----you are coming to the altar of God, and YOU remember that
someone has ought against you, YOU should leave the altar, go and
reconcile, and then God will accept your offering.

Let's look at four things concerning forgiveness:

1.) Who?----Romans 12:14. Is it easy to forgive someone who is a close friend?
Probably. But, is it easy to forgive someone who has persecuted you, someone who has said bad
things to you or about you? Probably not. Yet, the scripture tells us that we must 'bless them
which persecute (us), bless and curse not'.

2.) When?----Luke 17:4; Matthew 18:22. It seems that forgiveness is our responsibility
on a daily basis. When Peter in Matthew 18:21 asked about the number of times, he used the
number 7 (Jesus mentioned this number in another setting); after all, the number 7 is considered
to be the number of completion. However, Jesus stated that the number should not just be 7
times/day, but 70×7 . Do the math. $70 \times 7 = 490$ times/day which averages 3 times/minute for
24 hours. What Jesus was trying to tell Peter (and us) is that the acts of forgiveness should not
be counted. The problem we have is not a problem of arithmetic, but one of the heart. We
should always have a forgiving spirit. Does this mean that we are to be a doormat for the devil
and his crowd? No, not at all. But, it is telling us that we need to remember that Jesus forgave
us, and what we did to Him is much worse than anything anyone could do to us.

3.) How?----Ephesians 4:32. Forgive with your heart (be sincere). Forgive with you head
(forget about it----do not dwell on it); forgive with your mouth (tell the person); forgive with
your actions (show the person). NOTE: Perhaps you have heard that if you truly forgive, you
will forget. Unfortunately our minds are made so that we sometimes remember things we should
not, and don't remember things that we should. But, God knew what He was doing when He
made us that way. To forget is an active procedure. While we may never forget (meaning we
are unable to remember), we can choose to not dwell on the situation, and as we choose to do
that, we find that the memories begin to fade into the background, and they no longer have
control over our lives. (If you are holding a grudge against someone, that person has control
over you.) The New Testament Greek word that we translate 'forgive' contains various meanings,
but central to the word is the root idea of 'letting go' or 'releasing'. If we release it to God, He
will take care of it-----in the same way, if we release our sins to God, He will take care of them,

too. The way some people hold onto a grudge, you would think it is worth money!! But, let me ask you a question. Is the grudge worth your salvation? Look at the answer to # 4.

4.) Why?----Matthew 6:14, 15. Want to be forgiven? Then, we must forgive others.

Matthew 18:23-34

To make His point, Jesus uses the illustration of the parable of the unforgiving (unmerciful) servant. He compares the rule of heaven to an earthly king and his servants. Would you agree that every sin we commit is a debt to God?

In the parable, the king looks into his accounting register, and finds that one of his servants owes 10,000 talents. The value of a talent differed at various times, according to the amount of metal involved, but it is computed that at the time when Jesus gave the parable, the 10,000 talents would be equal to between \$10,000,000 and \$20,000,000. How did the servant come to owe that much? We are not told. However, it seems that Jesus used the measurement of the talent to remind us that every sin against God is a great sin. (We sometimes try to look at sins as little or big, but they are all the same in God's sight because each one is disobedience to Him.) It does seem that it is hopeless for this servant to pay the king such a large amount of money.

The servant admits (in verse 25) that he did not have the money. Yet, he seems to pray to the king to grant him a pardon and allow him time to pay it all. Re-read the petition of the servant. Do you think he is sincere in his petition? Is something missing in his attitude about the debt? Although he had nothing, he fancied himself able to pay all.

Whether or not the servant was sincere, the king granted a pardon. He did not forgive only a part of the debt; he forgave all of the debt! Reminds me of God. Psalm 103:2, 3 (Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not **all** his benefits; who forgiveth **all** our iniquities; ...) (Bold and underline are mine.)

But, when we look at the pardon which the king gave, we note that he released the man of his debt, but not for his responsibility.

The forgiven servant left the presence of the king, went into the town, located a man who owed him 'an hundred pence' (verse 28). Know how much an hundred pence equaled? Less than \$20.00. Surely this servant who had been forgiven of so much could forgive this small amount. But, no! When the man admitted that he, too, could not pay his bill, the forgiven servant would not extend the same forgiveness which he had just received (how quickly we forget!!), and had the man thrown into prison. We note, however, that he did not get away with his selfish behavior. Other servants were watching, and they went to tell the king. Now, in verse 32, we

see him no longer as the forgiven servant, but as the wicked servant. The king reminded him of how much he had been forgiven (\$20,000,000), yet he could not forgive a \$20.00 debt. The king was 'wroth' (angry) and turned the man over to the jailers (the 'tormentors') until he could pay.

As so often occurred with a parable, Jesus does not tell us the end of the story. Did the man figure out a way to pay, by perhaps selling all that he had.....? We do not know.

Matthew 18:35

However, Jesus did complete the parable for us with a reminder in verse 35. "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if you from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses." While God is ALWAYS ready to forgive, He cannot (and will not) dwell in an unforgiving heart. Is forgiveness easy? The answer could be a resounding "NO". Yet, it is honored by God as we experience not only His forgiveness, but show forgiveness to others as well.

Would you agree that forgiveness needs to be horizontal as well as vertical?

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A large portion of forgive is GIVE. Christ GAVE His all that we might be forgiven.

While God does not look at forgiveness as a dollar amount----to look at the parable, if we have been forgiven \$20,000,000, why can we not forgive \$20.00?

I hope you enjoy this session on forgiveness. At intervals, I will be posting other sessions with other topics. And, I hope you will revisit this site.

May God richly bless you and your family. And, remember, when you are ready to talk to Him, He is ready to listen!!

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