

Forgiveness Session Notes

Prompting passages **Eph 4:29-5:2** and **Col 3:8-15** and **Matt 18 (whole chapter, but esp. vv21-35)** and **Matt 6:12, 14-15**

- we are called, as believers in the Lord Jesus and children of our Father, to forgive others because that is what God has done for us, through the costly sacrifice of Christ.
- some illustrations from the Old Testament of the heart of God to separate sin from us so that He can focus on the people, and give a fresh start:
 - **Job 14:16-17**—the sins are still factually there, but God removes them from sight, to not look at them individually nor in detail
 - **Is 43:25; 44:22**—sin is like a spiritual debt owed; but God wipes or blots out the record of the debt so that someone looking for it can't see it; He doesn't just 'forget' but He chooses to not remember
 - **Mic 7:18-19**—the unparalleled character of God..."ready to forgive"...He not only has bundled sins in a bag, but He casts it away to a place where it will not be retrieved (**Is 38:17** says "*behind His back*", so He can focus on the person, not the sin)
 - see also illustrations in Ps 32:1; 51:9; 103:8-14; Is 40:2; Jer 31:34; 50:20

è forgiveness is a deliberate choice initially to cancel the debt they have incurred; then the on-going choice to not remember the sin against them

He really DOES desire to forgive...

- cf **Ps 86:5; 99:8; 130:1-4,7**
- **Matt 9:5-6** and He would give His life to achieve it **Matt 26:28; Eph 1:7; Col 2:13-15**
- message of John the Baptist (**Lk 3:3**) and throughout **Acts (5:31; 13:38; 26:18)**
- we need to take responsibility for our sin, but then turn to God in repentance, and we can have the assurance that the blood of Christ is the eternal, on-going payment for any sin of our past, present or future
- **1 Jn 1:7-9; 2:12**

Since the Father is so willing to forgive, He takes it very seriously that His children handle things the way He would.

Forgiveness is obviously a very serious matter. Yet we see from these passages that 'unforgiveness' is even more serious.

If we profess to be followers of Christ, saved by His self-sacrifice, then God requires that we demonstrate His new nature within us by offering forgiveness to those who have offended us.

What forgiveness is:

- we are willing to absorb the cost of their debt (and not be paid back)
- willingness & offer to forgive (yet transaction can have conditions)
- sending away, or putting away, having nothing to do with the sin so that focus can be on the person
- judicially dealing with the sin so the debt is paid, and the matter is not brought up against them again

The Greek word used most often in the New Testament implies *deliberate detachment; a break in involvement; a permission for it to be this way.*

There is a variation of this same word that is also used frequently, and it carries the idea *to set free or release from obligation*.

Paul and Luke favoured using a word that has the concept of *granting a favour or gift to someone*.

Interestingly, this doesn't just set *them* free, but it sets *us* free, by choosing to break the tie to the past. We give the whole matter over to God, and look to Him—not to the other person—to bring healing to our wounded hearts and minds

What forgiveness is NOT:

- not condoning the sin...it was wrong and still is.
- not excusable...so don't say "It's ok";
- not just an apology of confession, but repentance (though we are not judge of their genuineness).
- not necessarily renewed trust or involvement with each other.

There are different stages or steps of forgiveness:

Stage 1—appreciate the beauty and liberty of the forgiveness the Lord has gifted to us, and how He wants to do the same for others

- see Lk 7:47 (and its context)

Stage 2a—have an attitude of forgiveness, by first transacting with God...

- be like Jesus (Lk 23:43)
- 'justice' is often our motive, and we think they will get away with it; but giving it over to God allows it to be between them and God...and He will ultimately hold people to account if they don't repent.

Stage 2b—...and repent of any bitterness, anger, etc, in our heart

- the damage done to our heart by the sin of someone else does indeed need healing...and forgiving them is part of God's way of doing so. But there is damage being done by ME to my own spirit, soul and body if I harbour bitterness, anger, unforgiveness, etc, in my heart. Nobody '*makes*' us angry or bitter...or sad, or mad, or happy...it is a choice we make in how we will react and how we let thoughts affect us. — these are spiritual issues of our own sin — repent

Stage 3—where possible (and appropriate), transact with the offender

- possible? --may not know where they are; may not be alive - appropriate? –there could be unsafe conditions or stir up more trouble
- maybe others might be needed to assist (***e.g. Matt 18:15-16; Gal 6:1-2***)
- who initiates it? could be either party (***Matt 18:15; or 5:23-24***)
- the transaction doesn't actually happen if they don't repent...but if we have gone to them with a true appreciation for the gift of mercy and forgiveness we ourselves have received from God, and our own motives and attitude are in step with Christ, then we have done what we can for now to '*seek peace*' and '*be merciful as our Father is merciful*'

Stage 4—continue in the attitudes and efforts associated with forgiveness

- be like God, and deliberately choose to not remember it. This doesn't mean that we don't have any memory of it, but we can give over to God the temptation to dwell on it or to let it

wound our hearts again; this includes choosing not to allow it to come up in a negative, condemning way (internally or in our actions/speech).

- there may be opportunities for an on-going process of reconciliation

Note: it needs to be from the heart and not just from the head/will, or else we haven't touched enough on how the wound has affected our relationships, our sense of trust and safety, and even our identity.

Is forgiving someone for their good or ours?

- Both
 - sets them free when they repent
 - sets yourself free from being bound to the past, and it keeps us on good terms with our Father who wants us to forgive those made in His image
 - puts both lives into the reliable hands of the only perfect Judge, who also has paid the cost Himself to set you AND them free
- the pains and consequences of unresolved matters alert us as humans to the sin issue and the need for reconciliation, not only with each other but also to settle accounts with God before our time on this planet is over. this can give a Gospel opportunity, if the other person is an unbeliever

We don't just need to forgive others, but we might also be in vital need of forgiving ourselves for:

- false self-accusation for a part in the wrong choice of the other, or
- own sins, or
- being unforgiving
- "*blessed are poor in spirit*";
- there is really only one unforgivable sin (*Matt 12:31-32*) and you haven't committed it if you are a believer in Christ
- be encouraged with the thorough work of cleansing God has done for you, that can let you truly put it all away (even an active consciousness of it) **Heb 8:12; 9:13-14; 10:2, 22**

It is a blessed thing to be forgiven...yet the Lord said "*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*" (*Acts 20:35*). let's bring blessing to the other person and to ourselves--and to the broader community we are part of—by being channels through whom our merciful and gracious Saviour can be known