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Forgiveness – Matt 18:21-35

Introduction – We learned that confession is much more than simply saying, “I’m sorry.” Today, as we consider the need for reconciliation among injured parties, we must learn that forgiveness is something we are commanded to give. This is often as hard to do as it is for the offender to truly seek forgiveness. Even the giving of forgiveness is the gift of God, the manifestation of the work of the Spirit in us.

The Poetry of God’s Forgiveness – Let the words of Scripture get a hold of you –

“In those days and in that time,” says the Lord, “The iniquity of Israel shall be sought, but there shall be none; And the sins of Judah, but they shall not be found; For I will pardon those whom I preserve” (Jer 50:20).

“As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:12). Also – Isaiah 44:21-23, Mic 7:19

“To give knowledge of `salvation to His people By the remission of their sins...” (Luke 1:77).

This is what God did in Jesus Christ. He redeemed a people for Himself. Through nothing more than His mercy, He blots out our transgressions, restores us to Himself, and then rejoices over us with singing like the father over his prodigal son. And then He teaches us to daily seek forgiveness for our sins as we walk in the light (1 John 1:8-9, Psalm 86:5).

The Daily-ness of Giving Forgiveness (Col 3:12-15) – In your home, in this community of the church, in relationships with other believers, consider these commands – you who are the elect (i.e. the forgiven) of God. How often do you need to put on tender mercies? How often must you be kind? How often must you choose to put on love? Now consider some tougher ones: how often must your demeanor be one of humility and meekness?

Longsuffering – And what does longsuffering look like? *“bearing with one another”* (notice the ongoing nature of the participle), *“and forgiving one another”* (notice the ongoing nature of the participle). Longsuffering is just that – long and suffering.

What Kind of Forgiveness? – *“if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.”*

The Lord’s Prayer (Matt 6:12, 14-15) – This is connected to what Christ taught us in the Lord’s Prayer. Forgiveness, we know, is all of grace (Rom 11:6, 9:16), but a forgiven man is one who by definition forgives. The grace given to us is not given so that we can go on sinning (by, for instance, not forgiving) but so that we can now walk in the light with God. *“What makes me merciful is the grace of God. But the grace of God does make me merciful. If I am not merciful, there is only one explanation; I have never understood the mercy of God, I am outside of Christ. I am in my sins, unforgiven.”* D. Martin Lloyd-Jones.

Putting All of This Together – It means that, when forgiveness is sought, Christ grants it immediately, and so we should do the same. Jesus came to seek the sick, not the healthy. He came to forgive sinners, not the righteous. He was looking to extend forgiveness, not looking to see if He could find it in His heart to forgive. *“even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.”*

Christ forgives our sins fully and completely, no matter how wicked the sin was. Trespasses against us are always much smaller in ratio than our trespasses against the infinite, perfect, holy God of heaven. *“even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.”*

Christ does not put us in a state of probation or purgatory. Christ does not put us in a period of testing to see if we really mean it. He restores us each time we confess our sins to full fellowship with Him. *“even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.”*

Christ does not stop forgiving us, even when we sin again and again. How many times have you been forgiven for the same sin? *“even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.”*

Jesus Tells a Story (Matt 18:21-35) – How many times are we to forgive another sinner? When is enough, enough? When is the sin too egregious? Apparently, Jewish Rabbis had taught that one should forgive another three times, and so Peter’s standard might seem rather virtuous. But Jesus wants to teach Peter about another way – the kingdom’s way of forgiveness.

The Spirit of Forgiveness – In the parable, the ten thousand talents would be, in our world, billions of dollars. This man’s debt was immense. But not only does the master grant patience – he frees the man from the debt. He pays for his transgression. And he does so with great compassion (v27). He set no conditions for this release – it was all of grace. In contrast, this forgiven man goes and strangles a brother over a tiny fraction of that same debt – there were 6,000 denarii to the talent. When the servant is brought back to the master, he calls him *“a wicked servant.”* The Lord is concerned with the attitude of this man’s heart – *“you should have had compassion”* (v33).

The Work of Mercy – A man shown so much mercy should be the first one to extend such mercy to others. How many spouses feel as though they have been *“thrown into prison till he (or she) should pay the debt.”* While there are real consequences for sin (loss of trust, loss of positions of leadership, loss of privileges in a community, loss of goods or property or freedoms) one of those consequences to the confessing sinner is never to be loss of fellowship.

Forgiving Others – Last sermon, we talked about the need to confess our sins – all the way down to the bone. Today, the Lord is

instructing you, warning you, to forgive others who confess their sin to you – all the way down to the bone. The issue, in both situations, is not whether you feel like it or not. If you do not feel like forgiving, that is simply something to confess to the Lord yourself. Now, here is the glory of it all. When you do that, God forgives you – again and again. He will forgive you before you figure it all out. He will forgive you even though He knows you will stumble one day again in that same sin. He will forgive you before you perfectly confess that sin and before you are absolutely perfect.

So – Go and do likewise: *“even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.”*

Dave Hatcher – February 5th, 2006