

Forgiveness

This simple little noun carries a meaning, which, I believe, is of far greater importance to mankind than any other word to be found in English or any other language except, of course, God, Christ Jesus, Holy Spirit etc.. This is because it is only through its application that eternal life is possible. Given that man is a hopelessly depraved soul before God, with absolutely no chance of redemption by his own efforts, his fate is dependent entirely on God's grace of forgiveness. Without that incredible act of love whereby our Father God gave His only begotten Son to be the sacrificial lamb through whom there could be forgiveness, there could be no salvation.

Webster defines "forgiveness" as to give up resentment against or desire to punish; stop being angry with; pardon; to give up all claims to punish or extract punishment for an offense, to cancel or remit a debt." God's forgiveness is expressed by every nuance of that definition.

But that's not the end of the story! Over and over again Scripture demands that we forgive others as God has so lovingly forgiven us. Read the sample prayer that Jesus suggested to the apostles. A major element of that prayer was asking God to "*forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*" Then in Matthew 6:14, 15 Jesus tells them / us "*For if ye forgive men their trespasses your Heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*" There are many other passages in Scripture that make this point, but who needs any more than what our Lord Christ Jesus said here so plainly?

Nevertheless, we'll look at one more, just to illustrate how exceedingly important our acts of forgiveness are to our Lord. Consider the parable of the unforgiving servant as found in Matthew 18:23-25. The jist of this parable is that Jesus is expressing a particular aspect of the Kingdom of God by describing a "certain king" who was owed a huge debt by one of his servants. It suggests that it was one who had been guilty of great

offenses against the King's divine government. There was no way he could ever pay off such a huge debt. He was morally bankrupt. This symbolizes the fact that neither he, nor anyone else, could ever pay, that is make up to God, (who is symbolized by the king in the parable) for the wrong he had done. The king commanded him to be sold, which would be for some period of severe punishment. But the man begged for mercy and for patience to allow him to "pay thee all." Of course, no man could ever do this, yet the attitude of the debtor seemed to be one of penitence and repentance. Because of this, the benevolent king forgave him of his debt even as our Lord forgives man when he comes to repentance.

However, as soon as this servant had been forgiven, he went out to brethren who owed him a very small amount and demanded full payment under threat of prison. He who had been greatly forgiven was unwilling to forgive even a small transgression. Of course, this exceedingly unforgiving act was contrary to how the king had treated him. When the king heard of this, he withdrew his forgiveness and ordered the servant to be punished in full proportion to the size of his debt. The final verse of this parable brings us to conclude that all of this was not about salvation but simply about earthly punishment for lack of a forgiving nature. Note, here Jesus speaks of forgiving "*every one his brother their trespasses.*" (Matthew 18:35) Those involved here in the parable were all already saved, as are those who speak authentically in the example of what is commonly called the Lord's Prayer. The prayer begins with "Our Father." That is not a salutation legitimately expressible by anyone other than one who is a son or daughter of the Father through faith in our Lord and Savior Christ Jesus.

The message of this parable as with the cited portion of the Lord's prayer, is that all genuine Christians are instructed to be at all times forgiving of their brethren. To what extent are we obligated to forgive? The verse preceding the parable tells us, we should forgive not seven times, but seventy times seven times, that is as many times as necessary, I assume until the offender no longer offends. We must always keep in mind that if we have been saved, all our sins have been forgiven spiritually, forever. However, there are always earthly consequences to our sins, and the sin of unforgiveness is no

exception. Also, the need for a Christian's forgiveness goes beyond the church community; we are to forgive non-brethren as well. We are required to even forgive our most offending enemies. The Sermon on the Mount made that quite clear as do many other passages in the New Testament. Here is what Jesus said regarding your enemies as found in Matthew 5:43-48.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore, perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

A very important message exists under the surface of these verses, and that has to do with anger. Think of what Jesus is telling us we must do under extremely trying circumstances regarding our enemies. How can one possibly obey in these ways in a state of anger? Can you love the offender in anger, or pray for him in anger? As humans we are all susceptible to anger. But anger must not rule our lives, but must be dissolved as soon as it begins to manifest or else how can we possibly obey these commands? Paul in Ephesians 4:26 makes a vital point when he tells us "*Be ye angry, and sin not; let not the sun go down on your wrath.*" This tells us that a justified moment of anger may not be sin, but becomes sin when it remains in the heart for any extended period of time, like overnight. This is confirmed in the next verse "*neither give place to the devil.*" An anger held on to is an invitation to the devil. He loves such a condition of the heart. Here Paul is admonishing us to not give the devil any place, any opportunity to amplify the backsliding that anger can initiate.

Again, if you have come to the faith and are truly a son or daughter of God, you are saved; your sins have been forgiven. Therefore, you now have the power of the Holy Spirit in you, which includes the power to forgive any and all trespasses. If for any

reason you have been, or are being hurt by someone, and you cannot genuinely forgive, or to continue to forgive, but feel compelled to remain unforgiving, you have a problem, and potentially a very serious problem. If you are early in your faith, it may be that your old nature remains in control; you have not yet sufficiently subordinated your old nature to that new nature in you as represented by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Of course, you still have, and will continue to have free will to choose either one. However, if your unforgiveness persists and or repeatedly flares up, there may be an entirely different issue involved. This is because, as noted, the Holy Spirit who represents the result of God's forgiveness has given to your soul that essential propensity for the forgiveness of others. If that seems to be lacking, perhaps it is time to apply Philippians 2:12 and dig down deeply into the inner recesses of the soul and "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," and pray to God at the same time, that what is found there is in fact salvation, and not just a veneer of pious pretentious platitudes pretending to be a genuine saving faith.

Primarily, it is forgiveness of severe hurts with which we are dealing with. There are two kinds of these hurts; those we acknowledge that we deserve, and those we believe we ought not to suffer. The first kinds are generally resolved quite easily, because even the totally natural man can eventually forgive these once he has recognized that they are of his own doing. But the hurts we have determined are unwarranted, unprovoked, exceedingly mean, and totally unfair are the most difficult, if not impossible, for the natural man to forgive. It's in the same vein with some other things our Lord Jesus said while on earth, like "*love your enemy*," "turn the other cheek," etc. These are all total absurdities to the natural man. But if one is saved, one is no longer a natural man! That sinful nature is still there, but it has been subordinated, or is in the process of being so by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Therefore, these words of Jesus are not absurd, but are of primary importance, and should be most evidenced in your daily Christian walk. We should never squelch the Holy Spirit, but allow Him free reign over our lives. If we do, God will greatly bless us because of this expression of our trust in Him.

If we have been trespassed against and cannot forgive the trespasser, we are thrice damaged. First, there is the pain of the trespass itself. Second is the temporary denial of the comforting benefit provided by the Holy Spirit. And third, we have the festering painful cancer of unforgiveness eating away at our souls. The first may fade a little with time and prayer. But prayer and a repentant heart will restore the authority of the Comforter, who will then provide all of the power necessary to totally forgive, and thereby destroy the cancer. With this, the forgiver comes out the winner, because the soul is clean, and the Comforter is again in control, while the trespasser has God to deal with, under circumstances most unfavorable to him. Remember, “vengeance is mine; I will repay saith the Lord.” (Romans 12:19) It is not meant for any of us to get even or to even fight that battle. That is the Lord’s prerogative as He so clearly stated, and in saying so also commanded us not to take revenge ourselves. The natural man takes delight in applying vengeance, but while that may, for a moment, gladden his depraved natural heart, it often will lead to a counter measure and then is a counter-counter measure thereby accomplishing nothing but adding pain to both sides. Simple forgiveness will very soon, if not immediately, end all pain except that which God will in some just way impose on the guilty one. Who knows, your spirit-led forgiveness might even cause this person to repent.

If one is truly saved and a situation occurs where a trespass of such a horrendous nature occurs that it seems impossible to forgive, what happens? I don’t know. But I do know that we are told as cited above, that for God to forgive, we must forgive. On that basis I must conclude that there are highly negative earthly consequences to this manner of disobedience as there are to other infractions of His laws. Salvation is not lost, but the earthly portion of our lives may get much more difficult in ways which may be far worse than the pain of the original trespass.

Finally, it probably all gets down to the matter of trust, trust in our Lord and His Word. Do we really trust Him? Dr. Missler likes to express this idea by observing that most likely God asks us in some way every day, “Do you really trust me?” It may be through temptations, “unforgivable” transgressions, afflictions, or any number of situations

whereby we must make a choice between His way and the world's way. It is Missler's opinion, and one I share, that most of the time we fail the test. Unforgiveness is but one of many such ways, but His love and patience is infinite, and if we truly seek His way, these failures will become less and less frequent. Genuine forgiveness of those who hurt us, for whatever reason, is a splendid way of eventually earning a "passing grade" in this test of genuine trust. This is not in any way related to salvation that is already owned, but simply toward a more certain, loving, and devout Christian life, which surely is the desire of every sincere Christian.

How very blessed we are, those who have come to the faith, that through the Holy Bible, Christ Jesus has provided everything we need to know, if we will but apply it to serve Him as He wants to be served.. All of this present life is simply a short period of learning and love growth in preparation for our eternal heavenly service. Forgiving when there is no earthly justification or natural desire to do so is an important part of that preparation.