



“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,” Matthew 6:12.

Jesus Speaks on Forgiveness

Lesson Aim: To cultivate the grace of forgiveness.

L84. Date: November 1970. **Text:** Luke 17:1-5; Matthew 13:15-18, 21-22.

Topic: Forgiveness; Reconciliation: With Man; Sin: Forgiveness of.

INTRODUCTION

The original languages of the Bible use seven different words to speak of forgiveness. Three words are used in the Hebrew language of the Old Testament. The idea they convey is “to cover; to bear away; to pardon.” Four words are used in the Greek language of the New Testament. The idea they convey is “to put away; to disregard; to forget; to send away; to let go.” How rich and full of meaning the concept of forgiveness must be if God would use seven different words in the languages of men to convey its message.

No book of religion, except the Bible, teaches that God completely forgives sin. But the Bible sets forth the doctrine of divine forgiveness in a most glorious sense. Basic to the Christian gospel is the truth that man is affected by the terrible malady of sin and that God graciously forgives and restores the sinner.

Today's lesson aims at a survey of the teaching of Jesus concerning man forgiving man. Back of it is the premise that man can be forgiving because he belongs to God. That is, we can forgive because we have been forgiven. This concept is expressed by the apostle Paul in these words: **“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you,”** Ephesians 4:32. And Jesus taught this same truth in the parable recorded in Matthew 18:23-35.

The aim of this lesson is “to cultivate the grace of forgiveness.”

EXPOSITION

I. GUARD AGAINST OFFENCES, Luke 17:1-2.

1. Offences will arise between men, verse 1. Jesus said, **“It is impossible but that offences will come.”** We are still finite creatures. Even though children of God, we are still waging a battle with the carnal flesh. We offend others in many ways. Often the offence is unintended; sometimes it is unknown. But it is there just the same.

The best way to assure a forgiving spirit and fellowship between believers is to guard against anything which would mar their fellowship. Guard against offences.

Some people seem to be on the watch for something to which they can object or concerning which they may be offended. But look on these people with sympathy. They manifest an immature spirit. They are like a little child which should be guided. Be extra careful about your words, attitudes and actions around these people. While: “it is impossible but that offences will come,” resolve that, God being your helper, you will not be the one by whom they come.

2. Offences are very serious, verses 1, 2. Jesus pronounced a “woe” upon a person who is an offence to another. “Woe” is an interjection of grief or denunciation. It is a form of anathema, curse, or warning of punishment. It is a very solemn word, especially when spoken by the Lord Jesus. He never used the word in a light or careless way.

Jesus said that almost any fate (even death!) is preferable to one being an offence. **“... It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”** Such an act would mean drowning, of course, as Matthew 18:6 makes unquestionably clear.

The dread nature of offences magnifies the beauty of the spirit of forgiveness. It underscores, too, that forgiveness is a work of the Spirit and not a work of the flesh. Remember then, Christian brother, to guard against offences. This would mean (1) to refrain from being offensive and (2) to refuse to take offence at the words, attitudes, or actions of others.

II. KEEP A READINESS TO FORGIVE ANY OFFENCE, Luke 17:3-5; Matthew 18:21-22.

A proverbial expression describing two people making peace between themselves refers to “burying the hatchet.” Some wit advised that when we

bury the hatchet we should be careful not to leave the handle sticking out!

Believers are members of the body of Christ. They are indwelt by the Spirit of Christ. They are under the control of Christ who is the Head of the body. It is almost impossible to imagine believers bearing hard feelings toward one another. Is Christ divided? Then no more should those who are His be divided. Keep a readiness to forgive any offence.

1. Forgive instantly. **“ . . . If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him,”** Luke 17:3. It's as simple as that! No grudges borne; no self-pity which nurses wounded feelings; no delay in reconciliation with the brother. He trespasses; you point out his offense; he repents; you forgive. That's all. Simple, isn't it?

Most trouble which arises in churches is because forgiveness is not immediate. Grudges long borne, with forgiveness unsought and unwanted, is a dread affliction. Galatians 5:20 makes it clear that smoldering anger, animosity, envy, and selfishness (all of which are companions of an unforgiving spirit) are works of the carnal nature, not of the spiritual nature. The fruit of the Holy Spirit in the believer is the exact opposite of these. The person who refuses to forgive instantly is walking in the flesh, not in the Spirit.

2. Forgive repeatedly. **“And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day . . . thou shalt forgive him,”** Luke 17:4. It is contrary to the flesh nature to forgive at all. It is difficult to truly forgive the same person more than once. But to forgive the same person seven times in one day is impossible. Yes, literally impossible apart from the grace given by the Spirit of God. Simon Peter asked Jesus, **“ . . . how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?”** But Jesus answered, **“ . . . I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven,”** Matthew 18:21-22. Jesus did not mean to keep “a little black book” and record until you had forgiven 490 times after which you were under no obligation to forgive further. No, He means to forgive repeatedly without keeping a record of the injuries or weaknesses of others.

3. Forgive as a Christian. Upon hearing these teachings of Jesus the apostles requested, **“ . . . Lord, increase our faith,”** Luke 17:5. Does this seem a strange request to follow teachings on the grace of forgiveness? Not at all! It is most appropriate.

Forgiveness is not a work of the flesh. One is able to forgive only as he has the mind of Christ. Faith is a restful dependence upon God. So the more one enters into the relationship of restful dependence upon God, the more he is able to exercise the spirit of Christ; hence, the more forgiving he becomes.

Some believers have much problem at this point because they try to

forgive as a mortal man. This is the recourse the unsaved must follow. But to forgive as a Christian means God's Holy Spirit creates a true forgiving spirit in you. Only thus can true and complete forgiveness be exercised. Forgive as a Christian.

4. Forgive to be forgiven (Matthew 18:21-35). Many people have a forgiving spirit in order to receive the forgiveness of God. This is taught by precept (Matthew 6:12, 14-15; Mark 11:25-26; Luke 6:37) and by parable (Matthew 18:21-35). Many people have a problem understanding this teaching. Knowing this, Jesus selected this one petition of the Model Prayer ("Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors") to explain further. He made it clear that our forgiveness before God depends upon our willingness to forgive others.

Does this mean that our forgiving spirit is a work of merit upon which God is obligated to grant forgiveness to us?

No, indeed! It means our unforgiving spirit is so great a sin before God that He cannot forgive until we are willing to confess it and let Him take it away.

Suppose a murderer came to God and said, "God, please forgive all my sins. However, understand that I intend to go on committing murder."

Would he be forgiven? Suppose a harlot came before God and said, "God, please forgive all my sins. But understand that I intend to make no confession or ask no forgiveness for my moral depravity." Would she be forgiven? Suppose a person with an unforgiving spirit came before God and said, "God, please forgive all my sins. Understand, however, that I hate old Mr. So-and-So and that I have no intention to change my attitude." Would he be forgiven? Jesus said, "No!"

Why? Because an unforgiving spirit is a sin before God. And in order to receive forgiveness we must be willing to let Him take away all sin. **"If I regard (treasure up, hold on to) iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me,"** Psalm 66:18. Unless one has a willingness to forgive, he is not truly asking God for forgiveness.

III. SEEK RECONCILIATION WITH AN OFFENDED BROTHER, Matthew 18:15,19.

In spite of all our best efforts, offences will arise occasionally. In such instances, no believer should rest content until every effort is expended to effect forgiveness and reconciliation. Jesus gives some very practical guidelines to follow in this case. Read Matthew 18:15-19 very carefully.

1. Seek reconciliation privately—"between thee and him alone," verse 15. It is very possible reconciliation can be worked out privately and peace

restored. If so, good. There is no need to spread trouble by telling others of misunderstandings. The first principle is to pray and talk to the brother privately.

2-. Seek reconciliation persistently—”take with thee one or two or more,” verse 16. If peace cannot be restored in private communication, select one or two spiritually minded brethren to counsel the two brethren and try to work out the problem. There is no time to take “no” for an answer when seeking peace between brethren. No believer should stop if private counsel does not bring an end to misunderstanding. If these two or three cannot effect reconciliation, do not stop. “Tell it to the church,” verse 17. It is most serious for the body of Christ to be divided. As a last resort the whole congregation of believers should take the matter under advisement. Perhaps in the presence of all the rebellious brother will see the error of his way and be reconciled.

3. Seek reconciliation solemnly — “... **but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican,**” verse 17. Here at last is revealed the solemnity of the task of seeking reconciliation and the seriousness of an offence between brethren in the church. He who refuses to forgive and be reconciled indicates that he does not know Jesus; therefore, let him be to the church as a heathen. They must deny him fellowship therein; they must yearn and pray for him; they must seek to win him to Christ. This is a solemn business. It is not entered to pamper the feelings of men but to obey the commands of the Lord.

4. Seek reconciliation reverently — “... **Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven,**” verse 18. The church is exercising the authority of heaven in seeking reconciliation between brethren and excluding the impenitent and obstinate from fellowship of the saints. Therefore, all personal desires must be subservient to the leading of the Spirit in such deliberations. Offences are serious; reconciliation is important; how prayerful we all must be in dealing with these matters.

5. Seek reconciliation before worship. In Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus teaches that discord between brethren makes a difference in worship. Therefore, if you come to worship God and remember that you are not at peace with a brother, go first and be reconciled to your brother. Then you can worship aright. You see, the principle is that he who is in discord with a Christian brother cannot be in full accord with God. Ponder this solemn truth. It calls for a strict self-examination before your next prayer period.

CONCLUSION

Someone says, "I can forgive but I cannot forget." Another adds, "You have not truly forgiven until you have forgotten." Who is right?

The first statement is often used to excuse hard feelings one holds toward another. No, you cannot forget an offence any more than some other event in your life. God does not demand that you forget. But you can forgive with such completeness that you can remember without anger or ill will. That is true forgiveness.

Remember, a forgiving spirit is not produced by the flesh. The Holy Spirit of God, who lives within each believer, enables us to have the grace to truly forgive. Therefore, ask God to make you forgiving. Let your forgiving spirit toward another be in exact proportion to God's forgiving spirit toward you. Thus you will forgive totally and repeatedly.

Offences are a tragic reality. Forgiveness is blessed spirit. Reconciliation is a peaceful state. And the Holy Spirit makes peace possible between brethren.

QUESTIONS

1. What does "forgiveness" mean?
2. What is an "offence"?
3. Why do offences arise?
4. Why are offences so serious?
5. How can we be truly forgiving?
6. What does Matthew 6:12, 14-15 mean?
7. By what process is reconciliation to be sought?
8. What does Luke 23:34 teach?
9. How can you become more forgiving?
10. Explain the relation between forgiving and forgetting.