

INTRODUCTION.

- A. Scripture text: **Matthew 18:21-35.**
- B. There are three kindred spirits of the human heart--giving, forgiving and thanksgiving. And, usually where you find one, you will find the others.
- C. The parable of the unforgiving servant is a powerful lesson on how we must be ready to forgive others, if we expect to be forgiven by God. This story deeply illustrates Mt. 6:14-15.

I. WHAT IS FORGIVENESS?

- A. Forgiveness is not:
 - 1. Just ignoring those who wrong us. Now, this is fine if we are ignoring the slight because the offender did not have a chance; but, if we ignore it on the basis of contempt for the offender, that is a different matter.
 - 2. Forgiveness is more than a refusal to strike blow for blow, tooth for tooth. One might refrain from such but still harbor bitterness and ill will.
 - 3. Forgiveness is not ignoring the sin. God does not overlook sin; nor, should man. Jesus says rebuke, not ignore (Lk. 17:3).
"Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him."
 - 4. Forgiveness is not putting the offender on probation, while we discuss how inexcusable his behavior was, and then promising to forget it providing no other offenses are forthcoming.
- B. We can tell what forgiveness is by observing what God does when He forgives:
 - 1. He removes the notation from his record (Ac. 3:19).
"Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord;..."
 - 2. He forgets, putting it out of His memory (Heb. 8:12).
"FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE."
 - 3. He treats us as He did before we sinned, receiving us back wholeheartedly (see Lk. 15:20-24).

II. ATTITUDES TOWARD FORGIVENESS.

- A. "I cannot forgive."

No, God does not require the impossible! It is rather, "I will not forgive." Now, read Jas. 2: 10. The greatest of men have been able to forgive the severest of offenses. Joseph and Stephen are examples of this.
For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all.
- B. "I'm going to forgive you, but in the future I'm not going to have anything to do with you."

We are to "forgive" as Christ "forgives" (Eph. 4:32); and, He certainly does not forgive in this manner. Do you remember the definition of forgiveness?
And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.
- C. "It's a favor from me to you."

Actually, the reverse is true; for, the penitent offender can be forgiven of God without my extending forgiveness, but I cannot be forgiven unless I do forgive him!
- D. "I'm going to forgive you, but I'll never forget it."

This is like burying the hatchet with the handle sticking out. It is like sweeping the room, but leaving the dirt behind the door. Spurgeon said, "Forgive and forget; when you bury a mad dog, don't leave his tail above the ground." We must avoid keeping a file system. God does not (Heb. 10:17).
"AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE."

III. THE IMPORTANCE AND NECESSITY OF FORGIVING ONE ANOTHER.

- A. It is a command (Mk. 11:25; Col. 3:13).
(Mk 11:25) “And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions.”
(Col 3:13) bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.
- B. The example of Jesus Christ impels it (Lk. 23:34). We follow His example in being baptized, in eating the Lord’s Supper, in attending worship services, etc. Will we not follow His example in forgiving others?
But Jesus was saying, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves.
- C. Love calls for it (1Cor. 13:4; 1Pet. 4:8). Hate is the preventive to forgiveness.
(1Cor 13:4) Love is patient, love is kind, *and* is not jealous; love does not brag *and* is not arrogant,
(1Pet 4:8) Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.
- D. Forgive because we have been forgiven (Eph. 4:32).
The parable of the unmerciful servant illustrates this point.
And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.
- E. Forgive that we might be forgiven (Mt. 6:12, 14-15; Mk. 11:25).
These verses relate one of the plainest statements in the Bible. It is a “take it” or “leave it” proposition. It is forgive and be forgiven; or, refuse forgiveness and have forgiveness refused! The most expensive thing in the world you can do is harbor ill will toward another.
(Mt 6:12, 14-15) 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors... 14 "For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 "But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.
- F. *Forgive, for it may be later than you think.*
1. Christ may come (Mk. 13:32). And, who would want to be found at his coming (2Pet. 3:14) estranged from his fellowman.
 2. The object of your revenge and hate may die.
 3. You may die at any moment. After the death of Queen Caroline, Lord Chesterfield said a sad thing: “An unforgiving, unforgiven dies.”

IV. HOW DO YOU LEARN AND CULTIVATE FORGIVENESS?

- A. Ask for the assistance of God. But make sure you really want to be forgiving. This is the difference in saying and praying a prayer.
- B. You will find it easier to forgive when you consider how greatly you have been forgiven.
The parable of the unmerciful servant portrays this (Mt. 18:23-35). “Went out” (vs. 28) are key words in this parable. It is because we *go out* of the presence of God, forgetting His mercy extended to us, that we are in danger of acting as did the unmerciful servant.
- C. Recite a portion of the disciples' prayer, inserting your offender's name. Thus, you will pray, “Forgive me my trespasses as I forgive (insert name) his trespasses.”
- D. Practice praying for your offender. Be specific and call his name. Jesus prayed for His offenders; not for their punishment, but for forgiveness to be extended to them (see Lk. 23:34).
- E. Develop an understanding heart (Prov. 8:5; 1Kgs. 3:9, 12).
There is usually a cause why a person acts discourteously. He may be a victim of his own heredity or environment; or, he may have had something misrepresented to him, resulting in his offensive behavior.

V. “HOW” AM I TO FORGIVE?

- A. From the heart (Mt. 18:35).
“So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.”
We must avoid mere lip forgiveness (Mt. 15:8), while we continue to harbor malice and ill will in our hearts.

- B. "As" God forgives (Mt. 18:33; see Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13).

"Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?"

The "even as" of Col. 3:13 means "in the same manner." God forgives:

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| 1. <i>Freely</i> - no constraint. | 3. <i>Immediately</i> - no time payments. |
| 2. <i>Abundantly</i> - no piece-meals. | 4. <i>Finally</i> - does not bring it up again. |

- C. As often as necessary.

Peter thought seven times was sufficient. The rabbi said to forgive three times. Peter doubled this and added one, thinking such would be entirely sufficient. But, Jesus said, *"I say not unto thee until seven times: But, until seventy times seven"* (Mt. 18:21-22).

VI. WHO MUST TAKE THE INITIATIVE IN EFFECTING FORGIVENESS?

- A. The offender (Mt. 5:23-24).

"If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering."

Yes, before the offender can worship scripturally, he must first get things straightened out with the offended one. Thus, the shortest way to God may be the distance to your brother's house. If the inspired instructions of this passage were followed, a lot of worship services would be broken up. There is no use trying to talk to God if we are not on speaking terms with our brother.

- B. The offended (Mt. 18:15-17).

"And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 "But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. 17 "And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer."

And, yet, we often times take the attitude, "Well, he sinned against me; so let him take the initiative." Was not the Lord the offended one; yet, did he not leave heaven and come to seek and save the sinner?

CONCLUSION AND INVITATION.

- A. William J. Gaynor, former mayor of New York, was denounced, shot by a maniac and almost killed. While laying in the hospital, fighting for his life, he said, "Every night, I forgive everything and everybody." Great!
- B. Would you like to slip out into eternity during your sleep with a heart filled with hate, ill will, resentment and unforgiveness?
- C. *"Have I Really Forgiven My Offender" test:*
1. Do I secretly rejoice when I hear of some misfortune assailing my offender?
 2. Do I purposefully avoid his presence?
 3. Do I speak to him hesitatingly and only under duress?
 4. Do I vividly remember the wrong committed?
 5. Do I ever sit in silence and meditate and brood over the wrong done me?
 6. If a particular circumstance arose related to the offender demanding prayer, would I happily and anxiously go to God in his behalf?
 7. Have I sought an opportunity to do him a favor?
- D. Plan of salvation for non-Xians, erring Xians.