

Whatever happened to forgiveness?

What's it like when you apologize to someone and they refuse to forgive you?

What if no one ever forgives you?

What do you do if you offend someone and they demand something from you before they will forgive you?

Or worse yet, what if someone offends you and you refuse to forgive them?

We have a crisis in the whole world today, not just our country, but throughout the whole earth. That crisis is a crisis of unforgiveness. We have an unforgiving spirit that dominates life today. It affects marriages. It affects friendships. It affects Christian congregations. It affects families and nations. It even causes ethnic groups to fight and contest with one another and to even express hatred and vengeance towards each other.

Forgiveness has become a forgotten jewel of life. Where can we find solid council and direction on how to forgive one another? Good friend of mine, mentor by the name of Dr. Ron Mansdoerfer, often gives me this counseling and suggestion. We discuss issues such as forgiveness. He says, "Tom, the Bible still has answers for every area of life."

Today, I want us to take just a moment and look and see what the Bible has to say about this issue of forgiveness and unforgiveness. I call your attention to Matthew chapter 18 verses 15 to 35. We find that in that passage, Jesus is teaching His disciples about forgiveness.

In that text, they are two stories. In the first story, Jesus talks about how Christ followers, Christians, should respond to those who offend them, someone sins against them.

Somebody does something offensive to you and it hurts. How do you respond? What do you do? What is the Christ like action and behavior that you must follow that Christ says in his word? Well, we find direction in this example of how Jesus taught His disciples.

Take just a moment to look at it in that first story. In Matthew Eighteen, Jesus describes to His disciples the occasion: someone sins against them, offends them. What should they do? Well, first of all, they should go to that person, talk to him/her to see if in some way they might reconcile and somehow get that issue settled between them.

If that fails, then they take someone else with them or maybe two other people with them. So the two or three of them go together and talk with the person who caused the offense to see if they can somehow reconcile the issue between the two parties.

If that fails, the one offended should take the issue to a Christian congregation, mutual between the two parties and present to that congregation, and the Christian congregation would decide between the two as to how they could come together and reconcile together.

But what do you do if all else fails? None of it works. What do you do? Jesus commanded his disciples at that point, if the person who caused the offense refuses to repent and refuses to apologize, and you can not come together, Jesus then said, you treat that person like you would treat any other unbeliever. You treat them with love. Treat them with respect as we do all people, but you don't treat them as part of the Christian congregation anymore.

As soon as Jesus finished that discourse to His disciples, Peter immediately said, "Lord, how many times should I forgive someone who offends me, until seven times?" That was a great number for two people in that day, because the Jewish unwritten law was three times.

If someone offends you three times, you forgive. Three times. After that, it was kind of like here in the United States with the three strikes and out rule. After three times of forgiveness, you don't forgive them anymore.

Jesus took up a parable, and He taught them a parable dealing with this issue on how many times and how often, and some real solid instruction for His disciples to follow on forgiveness and unforgiveness.

The parable describes a king who had a debtor. This debtor owed him 10,000 talents, an insurmountable sum for that debtor to ever repay the king. The king forgave him, canceled the debt. That debtor went to one of his debtors, a person who owed him three days wages, a very small amount in comparison to what the king had forgiven him. He went to this debtor who owed him three days wages, grabbed him by the throat, and said, "Pay me every penny that you owe me, and if you don't pay me, then I will throw you into prison, and I will sell you and your family to pay the debt. "

Well that debtor, the second debtor's friends and family were, of course, really upset by how this man had treated their friend and family because he had been forgiven a huge debt. Couldn't he just forgive this debtor a small debt of three days wages?

So they went to the king, and they reported the story to the king. The king was furious, and he went to the original debtor whom he had forgiven 10,000 talents, and he said, "Couldn't you have forgiven that person three days wages when I canceled such a huge debt on your behalf? And he took him, and he threw him into prison until he paid the whole debt, which of course he could never do.

Those are the two stories that Jesus used to teach his disciples about forgiveness.

Why did He do that? Why did Jesus take the time to give this discourse plus the parable to His disciples about forgiveness? Jesus wanted to teach his disciples the characteristics of the Kingdom of Christ. He had spoken about the kingdom. He said that the Kingdom is here at hand. He had come to present the Kingdom. He had talked about it with His disciples and presented it to many people throughout the land of Israel prior to this occasion.

He wanted His disciples to know the characteristics of His kingdom, and He wanted them to know the marks of a Christ follower, someone who claims that they follow Christ, someone who claims that they trust Christ and obeys Him. He wanted them, His disciples, His intimate followers, to know what He expected of them, and how he expected them to live within His kingdom.

Well, what did He teach them about forgiveness? I want to mention a few things. He did not say some things common in our day to day, which has caused great confusion among people. What didn't Jesus say about forgiveness?

In story number one, He did not say that forgiveness depends upon justice, because justice was not done with that person who caused the offense. Oh yes, the one who caused harm was judged. That person was removed from the Christian community, but nothing was made right or just with the person offended. It was still there, not dealt with.

Another thing He didn't say in that first story was forgiveness depends upon some payment from another party. If the original person who caused the offense does not make some kind of an apology, some kind of retribution or reparation or repentance towards the person (s)he has offended, someone else better step in and take up the cause on behalf of the one who caused the offense, who failed to repent. Jesus didn't say that. Jesus didn't command that.

In the parable about the king, another thing Jesus did not say about forgiveness is it depends on the size of the issue. We see forgiveness when the king forgave one with 10,000 talents, and we see forgiveness not given to someone of three days' wages. Jesus taught that that debtor should have forgiven that man in the parable of the three days wages.

So it doesn't depend on whether it's a big offense or a little offense. That does not determine whether or not you forgive the person who offends you. Another thing forgiveness doesn't depend on is the seriousness of the offense.

Sometimes we are offended by a major offense and that just kind of sticks in the craw, it just hangs there. Whereas if someone really does only offend us to the effect of three days' wages, we can more easily forgive that. Then, the big offense, oh no, no, no, we can't forgive that one.

Well, Jesus did teach some very positive things about forgiveness and what He expected these disciples to follow and to obey. If they would be part of His kingdom, if they would claim the cause and the name of Christ, they must do certain things.

First of all, Jesus taught that forgiveness does not depend on injustice. If someone does an unjust action against you, disciples you forgive. It doesn't depend on whether there's justice or not, you forgive.

What if (s)he doesn't apologize? Jesus said forgive. What about repentance? It doesn't depend on. It doesn't depend upon frequency either, because Jesus said to Peter in response to his question, you forgive 70 times seven. I shouldn't say impossible, but it's certainly a huge number of times that you would forgive someone. So it doesn't depend on the frequency that someone sins against you.

Jesus said to His disciples furthermore, in His examples, it doesn't dependent upon quality of a repentance or of a retribution or a reparation paid by anyone to the one offended.

In other words, Jesus taught by these two stories to His disciples: no revenge, no vengeance, no resort to other people to intervene on behalf and pay the penalty for the offensive person who refuses to make things right. Jesus taught with these two stories to his disciples.

He said to them, in essence, disciples, no options, no conditions, no requirements to forgive. There's nothing required from the person who offends you as to how many times you forgive, whether it is just or unjust, whether that person apologizes or doesn't apologize, whether that person pays you something in retribution, or whether someone on behalf of the offense pays something to you...no conditions to forgive others their fault(s) against you.

Jesus taught His disciples no requirements whatsoever. None. Pardon the language of our day, Nada, Zilch, nothing. Nothing is required on the part of the offender that would make the one offended forgive or not forgive.

Jesus said unconditional forgiveness. It doesn't matter the extent, the degree, the frequency. Unconditional forgiveness. In so doing Jesus revealed part of His nature, grace and mercy. He expected His disciples to display towards others what He had displayed towards them, grace and mercy.

So now we come to you and me. What correlation does this story have to you and me? Well, it sounds really nice when we look at it at from a distance. Oh yeah, those disciples really need to hear that. What about you and me? How does this correlate to you and me, if at all?

It has great correlation to us, because we have, as I mentioned earlier, and insidious cancer infesting our nation, our world, and it's called unforgiveness. We refuse to forgive nations, families, ethnics, friendships, marriage, Christian congregations, so-called refusing to forgive, carrying a grudge for years, even centuries.

Jesus' words to His disciples come to us as well. Forgive with no conditions, no requirements on the part of the person who offended you. No reparations. You cannot demand any kind of retribution back to you. You cannot demand any kind of an apology or a repentance. No.

You forgive unconditionally without any requirements demanded on your part from the person(s) who offended you. You don't have that right. Jesus said that neither you nor I can demand anything from the person or persons who have offended us before we forgive them.

In His teaching about forgiveness to His disciples, He used a word that will help us understand forgiveness perhaps a little more clearly. The word that He used in those stories about forgiveness is actually a finance term that describes the cancellation of a debt.

Now, most of us, if not all of us, know what it's like to have a debt: credit card, a home mortgage, a car loan, college loans, all kinds of ways that we could have a debt. Forgiveness is when you owe somebody a debt: a mortgage, a car loan, school financing. That person comes to you and tears up the debt, cancels the debt, and rips it in half, and says that you no longer have a balance due, considers it paid for and sends it away.

That's forgiveness. That's forgiveness, and that's how Jesus said to His disciples and to us as well, how we must forgive. We cancel the debt. We destroy it. We tear it in half. We throw it away, discard it, and we forgive without conditions, without demands of any kind upon the person or persons who have offended us.

What can we conclude? Kind of a strong message, isn't it?

What can we conclude about you and me? What does this have to say to us? Well, it tells us Jesus' command. It's a command, not a suggestion. It's not a good idea. It's a command. He said, forgive.

I will read you the verse that He said in closing of these two stories to His disciples, because it very clearly is stated as a command that I want you to see it as found in Matthew Chapter Eighteen, verse number 35. It's at the close of it all. And here's what Jesus said,

“so my heavenly father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

And what He is referring to is the parable of the king who took the unjust debtor whom he had forgiven much, who refused to forgive a little, and took him, judged him, and punished him.

Jesus said, so will I do to you. So will the heavenly Father do to you if you refuse to forgive from your heart those who offend you. It's a command.

You might be a believer. You might be someone who would call yourself and describe yourself as a Christ follower. I'm a Christ follower. He demands you and me that we forgive without condition, those who offend us, regardless of ethnicity, regardless of degree and seriousness of the offense, despite how frequently they offend us, whether they ask forgiveness or repent at all, maybe never.

Jesus said, forgive. I have forgiven you much, like the king for gave 10,000 talents. I have forgiven you much. I've forgiven you everything. Therefore, I expect you to forgive much as I forgave much. I expect you to at least forgive little so it's a command to us.

So, I pray that when the Holy Spirit speaks to you, and I pray that He will speak to you, reveal to you, and identify to you those, or a person, or a group of people who have offended you, and you have refused to forgive them.

I pray that the spirit of God will convict you of your sin and will enable you and give you the strength and the ability to forgive and cancel it regardless of how serious the offense. You forgive, cancel the debt, tear it up, and destroy it. It's gone.

You might be an unbeliever. You make no pretense of following Christ. In fact, perhaps up until now, you don't want anything to do with Christ. You perhaps have many occasions in your life where you have failed to forgive, and you carry them around like a big burden upon your back. It eats at you and gnaws at your stomach and when you see that person, there's almost kind of like a bile that rises up within you, and an anger, a hatred for that person or perhaps even a group of people, maybe even a nation, a whole band of ethnic group, and you can't forgive them.

The major reason you can't forgive them is because you have never experienced the forgiveness of Christ. You see, the Father observed Adam and Eve in the Garden in Eden when they disobeyed Him, and they ate of the forbidden fruit. They sinned against God and a chasm came between them.

It separated between that relationship with God and with Adam and Eve. There was a barrier between them and God came to them. They didn't go to Him. He came to them. They wanted nothing to do with God. They didn't have any desire to fellowship with Him anymore.

God sought them out, and He gave them a promise. God promised them that He would send a savior, he would send someone who would slay the serpent, who had tempted Eve to take the forbidden fruit

Down through the centuries, many prophets have come and prophesied and died and foretold of the coming of such a savior, such a messiah, such a serpent's layer. Until one day He arrived. The Scriptures tell us in the fullness of time God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born in human flesh, in His name was Jesus. Jesus the Christ, the promised one, the Messiah God in the flesh.

The Scriptures tell us that within Jesus in His physical body dwelled all the fullness of God bodily: two natures, one body; human nature like you and me; God nature. Jesus lived a perfect life, never sinned, obeyed God completely and fully, and for that He was crucified, hung on a cross.

God said that when Christ would sacrifice Himself upon the cross, in so doing, He would pay the penalty and bridge the gap between God and sinners like you and me and would forgive our sin. Jesus became the Substitute, a substitutionary death on behalf of people like you and me, not for Himself, not for His own sin, but on behalf of sinners like you and me providing to the Father a perfect sacrifice on behalf of sinners like you and me, paying the penalty of

people like you and me, that we justly deserve to pay.

I'm asking the Holy Spirit to come to you today and to give to you new life which He alone can give. And I pray that He will come to you. Holy Spirit of God come to this person today. Give them new life. Enable them by Your power to trust upon Christ as their Substitute, to turn from their self-reliance and their rebellion against God to trust Christ.

I pray spirit of God that new life and forgiveness and by Your power will enable them to forgive those who perhaps have offended them with a horrible offense, for it is only by the power of Your Holy Spirit, that we are able to forgive as You forgave us.

I pray that the Spirit of God will take these truths today and use them in your life. Help you to grow stronger in your walk with Christ.

If you want to email you, you can reach me at hill_tom@att.net. You can see it in the directions below the video. It will give you that address, or you can visit my web site: www.masterministries.org.

Thank you for joining me.

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