

The Marks of a True Believer
Message Eleven
“If Ye Forgive, and, If Ye Forgive Not”
Matt 6:5-15

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- 5 And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.
- 6 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.
- 7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.
- 8 Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.
- 9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.
- 10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.
- 11 Give us this day our daily bread.
- 12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
- 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.
- 14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:
- 15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. KJV

Introduction

I don't know about you, but I find this appendage to the Model Prayer to be remarkable. It is remarkable in the powerful declaration that is made and it is remarkable in the choice of topics from the Prayer to emphasize in this way. This is the one element in the prayer that has to do with our interactions with other people. All of the rest of it concerns our relationship with God and with our own needs. And, it raises a question that is not easy to answer, "what connection is there between the forgiveness that I give and that which I receive." Jesus' comment here can mean nothing less than there is a vital and direct linkage between the two, but what is it and how am I to direct my life in regard to this connection?

In fact, these two verses give us a wonderful example of a problem that can only be resolved by asking and answering questions, following a time honored pattern of Bible study and interpretation.

We can begin by asking a couple of basic questions. "Am I sure that this actually says what it seems to be saying?" That is always a good place to begin because, sometimes, we have been taught things contrary to what is being said and it can distort our perception even on plain

wording of scripture. Having assured ourselves that we are reading the passage correctly, we should immediately ask, “what do other scriptures on this topic say?”

You will recall that Jesus gave a very powerful practical lesson in telling the story of “a certain king” and one of his servants to owed an enormous debt.

Matt 18:23-19:1

- 23 Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.
- 24 And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.
- 25 But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.
- 26 The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.
- 27 Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.
- 28 But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.
- 29 And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.
- 30 And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.
- 31 So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.
- 32 Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me:
- 33 Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?
- 34 And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.
- 35 So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses. KJV

The theme and the application are identical to the statements following the Lord’s prayer. The forgiveness presumably granted the servant of the king will be rescinded if the one who has been forgiven does not mirror that mercy toward those who ‘owe’ him. In the story here the issue is money whereas in the Model Prayer the issue is sin but the principle is the same. He who has been forgiven is absolutely bound to forgive others. It is not an optional matter.

Paul added a dimension to this duty by equating even the *manner* of the forgiveness we have received with that we are to give.

Eph 4:32

- 32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. KJV

Other translations render the ‘even as’ with ‘just as, but the intention is the same. So much as a redeemed human being has ability he is to forgive others in just the same way as he has been forgiven by God. So, how has the forgiven one been forgiven?

First of all, the Lord took the initiative, redeeming us from our sins, paying the total debt of them, before we were ever even born. The book in which the names of all of the redeemed are written is called “The Book of the Slain Lamb,” and it was written “before the foundation of the world.”

Secondly, He did a complete job so that no remnant of any sin remains in play between God and any one of His people.

Ps 103:12

12 As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. KJV

Rom 8:28-30

28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. KJV

His forgiveness is both complete and effective. You will notice that the verbs are in the past tense. The work is already done and the effects of it already made effective. When He moved upon us to cry out in repentance and to believe upon His Son, the work was already complete and He already saw us as glorified.

Not only that but He sacrificed, humbled Himself, to make our forgiveness possible.

Phil 2:5-8

5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. KJV

Phil 2:5-9

5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. NASU

Forgiving, especially when the one to which we are extending mercy is unrepentant and undeserving of it seems to make us weak. Real adults stand up for themselves, right? They make people pay for doing them wrong. At least that is what many think. It is humbling not to seek revenge, especially in those situations where we could effectively strike back.

And, it is very difficult, even after we have given our best effort in forgiveness, to truly let go of injuries we have received. Yet, that is exactly what the Lord did toward us and on our behalf, bearing all of the burden, taking care of the problem effectively, and truly letting it go.

2 Cor 5:21

21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. KJV

What examples do we have of NT figures as they handled the matter of being sinned against?

Without doubt, no act of forgiveness can ever match that of the Lord Jesus Himself as He hung on the cross, suffering incredible pain that had been inflicted upon Him by those surrounding Him there on Golgotha.

Luke 23:34

34 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots. KJV

The first great Christian example, of course, was Deacon Stephen as he was being stoned to death.

Acts 7:59-60

59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. KJV

But this is not the way it always went in times of conflict.

Acts 13:6-11

6 And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus:

7 Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God.

8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.

9 Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him,

10 And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?

11 And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not

seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. KJV

2 Tim 4:14

14 Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: KJV

3 John 9-11

9 I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.

10 Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.

11 Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God. KJV

How could Paul and John be in obedience to the Lord Jesus and, at the same time, remain in conflict with people? They were able to separate in their minds and in their souls wrongs done against their person with wrongs done against others, against the church, against the gospel, and against God Himself. The one they could forgive but not the others. In fact they were duty bound to condemn wickedness and warn others against it, to confront wicked men and call them out for their sins. This they could do while forgiving the person for sins against themselves.

So, biblical forgiveness is full and complete dismissal of a sin against our person, done regardless of whether the other asks for it or deserves it, originating solely within the heart of the one doing the forgiving. It has little, if anything, to do with reconciliation, which requires something from the other side, or confrontation with sin and wickedness, which is totally the duty of the believer, even toward those who have sinned against him personally.

But what does forgiveness of others have to do with my forgiveness? How is my relationship with God tied up in my attitude toward others?

Here is a reality that is often not mentioned when the topic of personal salvation is involved. There are behaviors, attitudes and actions that are inconsistent with spiritual life. If a person has truly repented of his sins there are things that he will not do as a practice of life. By 'practice of life' I mean things that are continually and habitually done, as a matter of course, without repentance nor correction.

The Scriptures mention several:

Luke 14:26-33

26 If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my

- disciple.
- 27 And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.
- 28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?
- 29 Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him,
- 30 Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.
- 31 Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?
- 32 Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace.
- 33 So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. KJV

One cannot be a true saint and love people or things more than he loves the Lord Jesus. A universal trait of those who have been born from above is that they love God, and Jesus specifically, above all things. It is idolatry to put anything before Him and idolatry is a sin of which one must repent in coming to faith. Idolatry and salvation are completely inconsistent.

1 Cor 6:9-10

- 9 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,
- 10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. KJV

Immorality (of all flavors, kinds and descriptions), Idolatry (just mentioned), dishonesty, covetousness, addictions to all mind altering substances, and all manner of unkind and abusive behavior are also inconsistent. If a person professes Christ and engages in any of these behaviors as a lifestyle, without repentance, he is simply deceived concerning his spiritual state. He is not a believer in the Lord Jesus.

So, likewise, is unforgiveness a trait of the unbelieving, not the child of God.

Matt 18

- 35 So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

That being said, no child of God is perfect. Every one of them struggles with temptation in one direction or another, often something from one of these lists, and sometimes is not successful in resisting the enticement or temptation to sin. **But they do not remain in sin.** They repent of it, turn from it, cry out to God for forgiveness, and return to faithful obedience.

Herein lies an issue that the modern Evangelical Church has abandoned for the most part. When a person makes a decision to abide in one of these sins he revokes his 'credentials' as a Christian.

He may be one but he cannot legitimately be recognized as a true believer. It is the responsibility of those in his life who are believers to point that out, regardless of how difficult it might be. This is the tool of mutual accountability that God has given to us to keep us from sin and to call us back from it when we do.

So, it is my duty to challenge you with this principle of Christ. If you refuse to forgive, and go on in that choice, you must know that you have taken back your own testimony that you are a child of God. If you continue in that state, I can say on the authority of God's Word, you are not a believer. If you repent of your stubbornness and truly forgive, you may resume your confidence that you are a believer.

There is one more issue that is related to this one and should be mentioned before we end this discussion. The person who has truly repented has faced his sins. He has looked squarely into the abyss of darkness at the core of his soul and been horrified by what he has seen there. His sins appear to him to be more awful than anything that anyone else has ever done. He has a full blown argument with Paul's assertion that he was the 'chief of sinners.' Nothing that anyone ever does to him even comes close to the wickedness that he has seen in himself.

The thought that this one holds that God has forgiven him of all that wickedness is almost completely unbelievable. How could He have done that? The saint asks. Why would he have done that? The repenting soul knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that he should be cast into Hell for his crimes against God and he marvels that he is not already there. Having received Immense Mercy from God, and firmly believing that he has indeed been forgiven, when the opportunity comes along for him to show mercy, it does not trouble him at all. Knowing that the Lord Jesus would have him do it is completely sufficient motivation for him.

It is simply not possible for the repentant soul to abide in a prideful state, to think of himself as one who should never be wronged or insulted, abused or persecuted, and that, if he is, he is perfectly within his rights to bear a grudge and 'get even' with the one who has offended him. That behavior belongs to the realm of the unregenerate, the lost, or the horribly backslidden child of God. If he is a child of God, the Lord will bring him to a place of repentance for descending into that pit and deliver him back into the state of mind portrayed in Jesus's conclusion of this prayer.

So, a person cannot 'earn' forgiveness by forgiving others. If he is unforgiven, then he is still in the bond of iniquity, imprisoned by sin, and a stranger to Grace. He has never experienced the forgiveness of God and, so, has no idea even where to start obeying this command of the Lord. He cannot do it even if such a thing were possible for he does not have the nature to do so.

On the other hand, forgiveness is one of the most important 'credentials' of a child of God. It is evidence that God has indeed done a work within him. It is a vital element of the New Nature that lives within him. When he follows the instructions of Paul and puts off the Old Man so as to put on the New, the spirit of forgiveness come with the process.

God's people have been forgiven, "all that debt," and they know it profoundly. They reflect that knowledge by refusing to carry grudges, harbor resentments, or seek revenge. But this does not keep them from being warriors against evil, calling out those who do wickedly, and opposing

ungodliness in an active and profound way.

One further note. The believer does not 'owe' the evil-doer forgiveness, he owes his duty to the Lord. I say that because there are those wicked people in the world who will do harm to a believer and then lecture the one he has harmed on their duty to forgive. Such people are evil to the core and though we have a duty concerning them before the Lord, we owe the evil doer nothing except to openly and clearly condemn his actions regardless of how he objects.

We end with words from the book of Mark on the same topic, spoken by Jesus at another time.

Mark 11:24-26

- 24 Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.
- 25 And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.
- 26 But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses. KJV