

The Marks of a True Believer
Message Seven
“Forgive Us Our Debts as We Forgive”
Matt 6:5-15

- 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.

Introduction: One of the inescapable marks of a sincere believer in Jesus Christ is that he forgives those who sin against him in a Biblical way.

Let me say at the outset that this message will not deal with the subject of reconciliation even though it is closely connected with forgiveness because the matter then becomes too large to handle in one message. Though forgiveness and reconciliation are indeed closely related they are not the same thing. Forgiving is a thing that a person can do without any action, or even interest, from the one being forgiven. Reconciliation, on the other hand, requires the involvement and interest of both parties. So, for today's message, we deal with forgiveness as a free standing topic.

The word translated 'forgive' is an interesting word. At times it is translated 'to allow' as in

Matt 3:13-15

- 13 Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.
- 14 But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?
- 15 And Jesus answering said unto him, ***Suffer it to be so*** now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. KJV

At other times it is translated 'to leave' as in 'to walk away from something.'

Matt 4:18-22

- 18 And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.
- 19 And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

- 20 And they straightway **left** their nets, and followed him.
21 And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them.
22 And they immediately **left** the ship and their father, and followed him. KJV

Still other times it is used to mean 'to send away.'

Matt 27:50

- 50 Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, **yielded up** the ghost. KJV

Mark 4:36

- 36 And when they had **sent away** the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships. KJV

Interestingly, the word is used many times in each of the four gospels but only a few times in the remaining books of the NT.

Each of the usages seems to carry the idea of letting go of something, dismissing something or separating from something. The Hebrew idea of forgive was to have something taken up as in **taken away** from a person.

Jesus intentionally used the same word in our text to speak of men forgiving men as He used of God forgiving a man. And Paul was very explicit on the matter.

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

There is no question but that we are to mirror God's forgiveness of our sins in the forgiveness that we show to others. ***We are to let go of, walk away from, release the sins of others against ourselves in a way that bears resemblance to God's mercy toward us in the matter of sin.***

Now, there are ways that the process will always be different. We are not the Creator, nor the Law-Giver and there is no way that anyone who has sinned against us has done anything even close to what those have done who have sinned against Him. The actions of sinners against God is such a profound and mighty thing that only the death of His Only Begotten Son, bearing in His Own Body the guilt of sinners could take their sins and guilt away. No such mechanism is required for us to release those who have sinned against us. (Though one might think so to watch some people. It almost seems that some think that an act of sin against them is on equal par to acts of rebellion against Him.)

This topic is one of the most difficult in scripture and the act of Christian forgiveness as taught in the Bible is maybe in the top five of the most difficult things to get right. The issue goes directly to the matters of the heart and often becomes confounded and confused in human deception. For example, I have had people be extremely unforgiving to me while lecturing me about forgiveness... go figure. True humility is called for and that is extremely difficult to come by.

The only humans who have ever known and manifested true humility have been the genuine saints of God. The forgiven one has seen the greatness of sin as well as the horror of it. He has caught a glimpse of the majesty of the One against Who he has sinned and that reality has stripped him of all

pride. The power of arrogance within him has been broken.

Because of that he cannot count any sin against himself as a great thing. His sins against God are infinitely more huge in his mind. He can, by measuring sin in this way, let go of even enormous sins against his person as Stephen did as he was being stoned.

Acts 7:59-8:1

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

Here we find the hypocrite often getting caught. He knows that he is commanded to forgive but to him a sin against his person so wounds his pride that he cannot let go. He twists and turns, writhes and contorts, within the language of scripture trying to portray to others that he has forgiven even while executing his revenge, plotting and planning how he can destroy the one who has dared to ruffle his feathers.

Yet we know what the scriptures say.

Rom 12:9-10

9 Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.

10 Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; KJV

Rom 12:9-10

9 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; NAS

Rom 12:9-10

9 Don't just pretend that you love others: really love them. Hate what is wrong. Stand on the side of the good. 10 Love each other with brotherly affection and take delight in honoring each other. TLB

The hypocrite, by definition, cannot do this and he is caught in condemnation because of it.

IV Within the realm of Christendom we find a number of groups who deal with the matter of forgiveness wrongly.

One of these groups is the timid who are really glad that Jesus said this because they never want to confront anyone about anything, ever. Their fear of someone being angry with them is so great that they are happy to hide behind the doctrine of forgiveness and pretend that it is a biblical mandate that forever excuses them from any kind of confrontation, even the loving kind.

‘Piggy-backing’ onto this group we find another set of supposed believers who never, ever, want to be confronted in any way. Regardless of the scriptural teachings concerning holding one another accountable, these are so stuck in their pride that they are happy to move among the timid, knowing they are ‘safe’ and (supposedly) forgiven.

As an aside, don't ever speak to these about their need to forgive. They will quickly inform you that you are being judgmental and unforgiving in questioning them.

Then, there is the hypocritical forgiver. These are generally found among those who seem to be the most knowledgeable concerning scriptures: teachers and office-holders, those who would like to be such, and even preachers. These know how to use the language, to 'talk the talk,' to twist and contort within the language of scripture, pretending to forgive while still taking their vengeance on those who dare to cross them.

These will even undertake to use the mechanisms of the church to attack those who have dared to oppose their will. I have seen preachers undertake to use church discipline to punish people out of revenge and anger. I have seen hypocrites try to deceive church leadership to get them to help carry out a plan of twisted revenge against their target. These are some of the most dangerous people to have in a church. They are extremely deceptive, often quite persuasive, and very clever. They assume and presume upon the timidity of others to call them out and confront their wickedness. Then, if their plan backfires on them and someone does call them out for their wickedness, they will pretend to be the 'victim of unforgiveness,' the very sin of which they themselves are guilty.

In another group we find those who do not really care what the Bible says on the matter. They are determined to hold on to grudges and offenses until they have fully gotten 'even' with the offenders. (Yes, such people really do exist who call themselves 'Christian.')

Then, sometimes, we find within the ranks of the church those who are so committed to the confrontation and enforcement of the rules that forgiveness depends entirely upon the offender repenting (and repenting exactly as their 'prosecutor' demands.) Of course, this procedure is often modified depending upon the relative 'status' of the offender within the church. **Forgiveness, however, depends only upon the choices of the one who has been sinned against, totally apart from anything in the behavior or attitudes of the offender.**

V So, how is this to actually work?

When we are sinned against, a whole set of responsibilities, duties and issues come into play.

- I There is the issue of our own personal registry, or ledger, of offenses that have been committed against us, those items for which we feel the right to be angry and resentful, even to seek revenge against the person who has wronged us.
- II There is the matter of our duty, under Christ, to every other human with whom we interact, regardless of their spiritual condition.
- III We have, further, a special duty toward every child of God which is only amplified if they are also members of the same local church as we are.
- IV We have a duty to the church itself and particularly if the matter becomes a public issue.
- V Finally, and most importantly, we have our duty to Christ Himself to handle all matters, particularly matters of this kind, according to His instructions.

It is important that we understand the principle that in order for us to properly perform our duties to those who have sinned against us, to the church, and to the Lord, we must deal with our personal record of those sins that have been committed against us and the persons who have committed them.

Our standing with God is in jeopardy and our attitudes toward others are flawed until the ledger is empty, until there is nothing on any list for which we feel the right to be angry, bitter, or vengeful. There is nothing, spiritually speaking, that we can do rightly until the matter is resolved. Our heart, you see, is in a wrong place and He only looks on the heart to evaluate our spiritual service.

We must release the one who has sinned against us from their debt and then we must release our own anger and resentment. We must walk away from any purpose of retaliation and revenge and we must take up the purpose to love them purely (which means earnestly and honestly desiring what is spiritually best for them), and we must forgive them like God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven us. (Eph 4:32 - already referenced)

But, how does one do that?

- VI We must re-visit our own forgiven status;
- remembering the depth of our own sins against God,
 - reliving the reality of confronting and confessing our sins,
 - renewing that vision of ourselves as the most profound of sinners,
 - recapturing our profound humility in that moment.

- VII We must also recover that same astonishment we first felt when we realized that God has loved us in spite of our sins and Jesus has borne the load to pay our debt to Him.

- VIII Then, from that place, we are to look at whatever has been done against us, compared it to our offenses against God and what we have received from Him in mercy, then give the 'crime,' the sin against us, its proper weight, which should equal zero.

(If we cannot do that here, then we have not properly done #1 and #2, we must walk back through them until the sins of others against us are truly things without weight.)

- IX Having seen the sin as so incredibly small by comparison with our sins against God and seeing that releasing the sin in forgiveness does not even register as a comparison with the forgiveness we have received, we dismiss the sin, erase it from our list, and count it as nothing.

III. Only from that place can you proceed with a clear heart to perform whatever might be your duties toward this person.

In the case of evil people, those who have proven that they will continue to harm you if you get too close to them, you may need to back away, put up safeguards and fences against them harming you further. Forgiveness does not mean that you must continually put yourself in a place to be hurt by wicked ones.

In the case of believers, those whom you are sure they belong to Christ, there may be nothing at all

to do. You may simply need to bear the wrong. This, by the way, is the most common need... the thing is no big deal and needs no action at all. Paul wondered aloud at the unwillingness of Christians to simply take a wrong and do nothing at all in return.

1 Cor 6:7-8

7 Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?

8 Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren. KJV

If you will notice, he says that by refusing to take wrong and by not being willing to be defrauded we actually become the wrong-doer and the defrauder. How does that happen? It is a Christian duty to not only forgive but often to let matters go. Not everything is a Supreme Court case.

Unfortunately, the wisdom required to recognize this is rare.

If the person does need to be addressed, Jesus gave a mechanism in Matt 18 to which the one offended and the offender are required to be subject. Sometimes the church leadership may tell you that this is not a thing to be pursued.

In extremely rare cases, church discipline may be necessary, but if it is and if you are the one who has been sinned against, your heart should be so pure from having forgiven that you can honestly weep for the offending one. There should be no self-satisfaction in seeing someone disfellowshipped over sinning against you.

These things can only be done rightly if true forgiveness has occurred.

- If we choose to bear the wrong it must be with no remaining resentment or bitterness.
- If we choose to confront, the desire to recover the person in love must be our only motivation.
- If discipline occurs it must be done in tears, longing for repentance in the rebellious one.

In all we must be on guard every step of the way that bitterness and revenge not raise their ugly heads.

X So, how is it with you?

Is your list empty?

Or, do you have a record of the things that have been done against you for which you are waiting your opportunity for revenge?

Sometimes church folk like to dress their revenge up in religious language so as to make it seem that they are being godly and holding people 'Accountable' when the reality is that they are getting their revenge while seeking to fly under the banner of godliness. It is profoundly Ungodly to do such a thing. You become the sinner and the one you are punishing becomes the one who has been defrauded.

Do you really believe that Jesus was serious about this thing?

Both Matthew and Luke included these words in their record of the Model Prayer, Jesus obviously said them. Then Matthew added something that the Lord said after He closed the prayer.

- 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.

Luke included these words from the Sermon on the Mount.

- Luke 6:37
37 Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: KJV

Mark did not record the Model Prayer but he did remember and record this.

- Mark 11:25-26
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

Then, we have this.

- Matt 18:21-35
21 Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?
22 Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.
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**

Could there have been a closing to this story that was any more terrifying? There is at least the suggestion that one, once forgiven, might have that forgiveness rescinded for failure to forgive. I do believe that is intended to strike terror into the soul of any person who upon hearing this teaching is consciously bearing one or more grudges over wrongs done to him and refusing to let them go in forgiveness. He/she is proving themselves to be unregenerate, or dangerously close to being so.

Do we earn salvation by forgiving others? Absolutely not! But Jesus did affirm, in no uncertain terms that His people, His Elect, His forgiven ones, are people who forgive those who sin against them in an humble, honest, loving way and that those who do not are not His people. ***One of the inescapable marks of a sincere believer in Jesus Christ is that he forgives those who sin against him in a Biblical way.***