

Forgiveness

Introduction

- A. **It happened in a little church, in a little town.** Toward the conclusion of the service, a trembling woman came forward and sat on the front pew, asking forgiveness. She had missed assembling with Christians for several years. The woman who sat directly behind her, shocked, grew pale and nervous. **Several in the audience seemed bewildered and wondered if trouble would start all over again; for there had been trouble, lots of it, tragic and heart-breaking—two murders, court trials with opposing families, and one death in the electric chair.**
- B. **The responding woman was the mother of the murderer. The woman behind her...it was her husband and son whose blood had been shed. What will her reaction be?** Will her mercy go unstrained? Will her forgiveness be big enough to welcome the mother of the man who widowed her and left her without both husband and son? It was! **She went to her, clasped her hand, and said, “I’m glad you have come back to be with us in the church.” She later commented, “I feel better than I have felt in years. Now I feel free.”**
- C. **“Now I feel free”—an expression of liberating principle in the art of living! One may be imprisoned while he is free or be free while he is in prison, depending on how he binds or looses himself within his own heart. (Movie: *A Question of Faith*)**
- D. Amid the fabulous wealth of Egypt and the glory and splendor of royalty, nervousness paced the second ruling power in the land as emotion pulled at his heart strings. But like sunshine suddenly darting through breaking clouds, a sign of relief went up at the announcement: **“Joseph, it is a boy!” He named that son “Manasseh” (cf. Genesis 41:51), a name that means “Forgiveness.”**
- E. **What had he forgotten? The unmerciful abuse of his envious brothers who sold him into slavery; his servitude in Potiphar’s house; the lies of a lustful, conniving, vengeful woman that sent him to prison. Now it is different—now he is on top! And the secret of the climb was his own forgiving spirit.** He could have chained and shackled himself with rancor and retaliation, vindictiveness and vengeance—many have! But he didn’t! He enjoyed the only real freedom there is, freedom within; so he was free to rise—and he did!

#1: Three Kinds of Forgiveness

- A. Inasmuch as sin is common to man (1 John 1:8), **we shall ever be called upon to face the problem of imperfection and the need of forgiveness:**

- *Forgiveness from God*—(Matthew 6:9-12)
- *Forgiveness of others*—(Matthew 6:12), and
- *Forgiveness of self*—(Philippians 3:13).

B. **Paul was able to forgive himself and then he was able to reach for better things.** The only way to judge a man's religion is by what he does (**Matthew 12:33**). If your religion does not have its roots deep enough to tap God and his fruit-bearing power, and in return, produce the godly fruit of forgiveness, then it is too shallow to be worth very much.

#2: *The Beauty of Forgiveness*

Consider the beauty of forgiveness, as it is witnessed by others. Forgiveness is:

- *Understanding* (**Luke 23:34**). Even on the cross, Jesus understood that the very people that were taking his life in the most cruel fashion imaginable, didn't realize what they were doing. He prayed that they might be forgiven.
- *Merciful* (**Matthew 18:27**). Forgiveness is a demonstration of mercy. It is not giving to someone what they deserve, but it is treating them as God has treated us. The servant didn't deserve to have his debt forgiven, but the master forgave it anyway. (**Ex:** The Loving Father in the story of the Prodigal Son).
- *Forgetful* (**Hebrews 10:17**). God not only forgives, but he also forgets. This, of course, is the ideal way of demonstrating forgiveness. This can be our goal. Yet, there may be times when it is impossible for man to forget a particular sin, but it can be forgiven and the bitterness that it causes removed or not allowed to affect one's actions.
- *Numberless* (**Matthew 18:21-22**). Peter thought he was being generous, offering to forgive someone up to seven times. This was more generous than the average person of that day. Jesus explains that this is not enough. We must be willing to forgive as long as the person is willing to repent, and perhaps even when the person does not repent.
- *Helpful Like the Sandal Tree that Perfumes the Axe that Lays It Low* (**Matthew 5:44**). This forgiveness enables one to even love his enemies and the very ones that are persecuting us. There are many examples told of how executioners were converted after witnessing the death of the Christian. They saw the Christian's courage in the face of death, but they also saw the forgiveness that Christians could demonstrate even toward their enemies. (**Ex:** **Jesus and Stephen**)
- *God-like* (**Psalms 86:5**). When we forgive others, we are demonstrating the quality of God Himself.

#3: *Why Should I Forgive?*

There are times, when it is the most difficult thing in the world to forgive someone who has wronged you. They have embarrassed you or hurt you or a member of your family and you find it difficult to forgive. **Why should you forgive others?**

- ***It is the wronged person's glory to forgive* (Proverbs 19:11).** Forgiveness distinguishes big and little people—only the big and brave can practice it. **Lord Bacon writes:**

***“Generous and magnanimous minds are readiest to forgive;
And it is a weakness and impotency of mind to be unable to forgive.”***

- ***The good life cannot go on without forgiving and forgetting.*** Bury the past and don't dwell on it. It will only serve to ruin your own life and the life of your loved ones.
- ***An awareness of how much I need forgiveness makes me more tolerant of others* (Matthew 7:3).** Unfortunately, those who are guilty of the same wrong find it harder to forgive others. It is what psychology calls projection; it is their way of fighting or hiding their own sin.
- ***A conviction that God will not forgive me unless I forgive others encourages this God-like goodness* (Matthew 6:15).** How desperately, we need God's forgiveness. Without it, we are lost forever, without any hope. We cannot have God's forgiveness unless we are willing to forgive.
- ***A practical view of life—a recognition of humanity's fallibility and goodness urges clemency.*** **Richard Baxter**, in his old age, put it this way:

***I see that good men are not as good
As I once thought they were, and find
that few men are as bad as their enemies imagine.”***

- ***A meditative stroll through the cemetery, as John Greenleaf Whittier stated, helps one to forgive:***

***“...I strolled among
the green mounds of the village burial-place;
where, pondering how all human love and hate
find one sad level...
Awed for myself, and pitying my race, depart,
Our common sorrow, like a mighty wave,
Swept all my pride away, and, trembling, I forgave.”***

Conclusion

A. **Forgiveness is one of the most difficult traits for the Christian to develop.**

It is one that we must determine to develop and practice under all circumstances. Jesus give this stern warning in answer to Peter's question (**Matthew 18:21-35**). If forgiveness is commanded by God, and it is, then, it is within our power to forgive!

B. **I wonder how many churches have been split, how many people have never come back to church, because of an unforgiving spirit. How desperately Christians need to practice more genuine forgiveness.**