

The Cross – Finding Life in Jesus' Death

Day 48 – Forgiveness, Part 1

Dear friend,

We have spent two lessons on the subject of overcoming bitterness. In the first lesson, we saw an example of how the cross of Jesus Christ turns our bitterness into sweetness, and in the second lesson, we saw how "Mara" (bitterness) became "Naomi" (pleasantness) once again, through the work of the "kinsman-redeemer."

I was very surprised to read the answers people turned in on those two lessons because a majority of people stated that they either had struggled with bitterness in the past or are currently dealing with it. One such comment summarizes the thoughts of many people who went through those two lessons:

Forgiving people has been something that I have struggled with, and although I said I forgave them, I constantly thought of their doing me wrong and cherished thoughts of getting even with them. I have finally understood that I have given in to bitterness, and that bitterness has spawned many of my problems. I thank God I have learned this through His Spirit. I can now begin the healing process, but I am unsure of how to start."

As a result of comments like this one, I determined it would be important to continue this study, in hope of providing specific and practical biblical instruction on how to rid one's life of the poison of bitterness. This is what I hope to accomplish in the next two lessons.

Let me say first that I believe all bitterness can be entirely removed from our lives by understanding our own forgiveness in Jesus Christ. I don't make that statement lightly. I know it is possible that I am writing to those who, like my wife Jody, may have been abused as a child, or to those who have had loved ones taken from them seemingly "too early," and to those who have suffered other losses and have very difficult circumstances in their lives. And yet, rightly understood, this matter of forgiveness can change the bitterest person into a gracious and loving one.

Let's start today's study with a parable that Jesus told:

²¹ Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" ²² Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. ²³ "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. ²⁵ Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. ²⁶ "The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' ²⁷ The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. ²⁸ "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. ²⁹ "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' ³⁰ "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the

man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. ³¹ When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. ³² "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³ Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' ³⁴ In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. ³⁵ "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart." Matthew 18:21-35

Question 1. Parables in the Bible have one main point. Though there are usually many lessons we can learn from them, it is important to understand that Jesus told parables to illustrate one main point, or to teach one main truth. What is the main point that Jesus is teaching in the parable from Matthew 18:21-35?

I believe that the main point in the above parable is that our sin against God, and therefore our debt owed, is much greater than anyone else's sins against us. And because God has forgiven us a huge, un-payable debt in Christ, we must forgive others of their smaller debts against us.

Question 2. How much did the first servant owe the king?

Question 3. How much did the "fellow servant" owe the first servant?

Ah, here the Scriptures reveal to us the correct understanding we should have about the sins other people commit against us: that is, we should understand that our sins against God were much greater than anything anyone has ever done to us. We owe "10,000 talents" (a sum so large that we are without resources to pay - see verse 25) to God for our sins, whereas what others have done to us, by comparison, amounts to only a hundred denarii.

This parable puts sin in its proper perspective, allowing us to see the heinous nature of our own sins that have put to our account a debt we cannot pay, which gives us proper perspective on the sins of others. We must learn to view what others have

ever done to us in light of what we have done to God, and make an accurate measurement and comparison of the two.

And if God can, through the death of His Son, forgive the immenseness of our debt to Him, should we not forgive others? The teaching of the parable can be summarized by verse 33.

Question 4. Please write out verse Matthew 18:33 right here:



You see, this matter of viewing our own sins and the sins of others from a right and biblical perspective is so very important. When others sin against us we have a tendency to dwell on that sin, and whatever we dwell on, we magnify. Pretty soon we simply can't forgive because their sin appears so huge in our eyes.

And yet if we gain the biblical perspective, we will weigh out others' sins against us in light of our sins against God. We will be amazed at the huge debt we have been forgiven, and others' sins against us will be viewed properly as much smaller than our own acts of rebellion against God.

The problem in the parable in Matthew 18:23-35 above is that the debtor did not truly receive the forgiveness offered (as is evidenced by the fact that he demanded payment from others for a debt that the king said he *did not owe*), and therefore he was not able to extend forgiveness to others.

So the truth is that as we recognize the enormity of Christ's forgiveness toward us, understanding that at the cross He paid our debt in full, and we receive it and thank Him for this amazing gift of forgiveness, then we are able to offer forgiveness to those who have sinned against us, thereby giving an exit route for bitterness.

Question 5. Have you had this proper perspective regarding your own sins toward God and others' sins against you? If not, do you see it now?



Betty wrote, *"This was a wake-up call. I have battled with bitterness since I was 12 years old, thinking I could not forgive some people who marred my life with lots of scars. Now, after the end of my first day of studying about bitterness, I was jogged back to reality and now feel lighter in my heart. Whatever was done to me in the past is so small compared to what I had done to my Father. He had every right to punish me, but He chose to forgive me by sacrificing his only Son to make atonement."*

It is important at this point to show exactly what forgiveness is, so that we might understand both what we have received from God through the death of His Son, and also what we must extend to others.

Forgiveness means at least the following three things. Suppose, for example, that I sin against you in some way, and then I confess that sin and ask for your forgiveness. If you say that you forgive me, it means that you agree to these three points:

- 1-You will not bring up the sin to me ever again.
- 2-You will not bring the sin up to others behind my back.
- 3-You will not dwell on the sin in your mind.

All three of these come from the Scriptures, just one of which we will examine here:

In Hebrews 8:12 the author quotes Jeremiah 31:31-34:

¹² **For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." Hebrews 8:12**

From Jeremiah 31 we see that God promises to forgive the nation of Israel for their rebellion against Him. This Old Testament passage, applying to the nation of Israel, is quoted in the New Testament and applied to all believers.

Question 6. Please write out the three aspects of forgiveness as listed above:



Question 7. Which of the above three truths about forgiveness does Hebrews 8:12 teach?



When God forgives, He chooses to remember our sins no more. Therefore He would never bring up our sin to us again, nor would He speak to others about our sin behind our backs, nor does He dwell on the sin. Our sin *died* at the cross of Jesus Christ. So Hebrews 8:12 includes each of the three truths about forgiveness stated above. These three points are how God forgives, and they are how God requires us to forgive also.

Of course it is extremely difficult to forgive in this manner; indeed, it is impossible apart from receiving God's grace ourselves (as the above parable teaches).

One of my young twin daughters (I can't remember which one) accidentally smacked my son, Joshua, with a cup right to his eye. It really hurt him and he cried hard for a time. His sister stood there trying to comfort him, practically begging his forgiveness. In the pain of the moment, and the bitterness of his young heart, he cried out, "It's really hard to forgive when you're in pain!"

And this is the very reason that we connect this matter of forgiveness and the removal of bitterness to the cross of Jesus Christ. We must view this cross long and hard and often, and see in it not only our own forgiveness by Jesus, Who *was in intense pain*, but also the necessity to forgive others even though we suffer from the pain caused by their sin against us.

¹⁵ **See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. Hebrews 12:15**

Notice the command above is *first* to not miss the grace of God, and *then* to make sure no bitter root grows up. Herein is the reason why we must daily kneel at the foot of the cross in repentance, asking forgiveness for our sins, that we might receive God's grace, and that no root of bitterness would grow up. The following hymn has long been a favorite of mine, and is applicable here:

[Blessed Redeemer! Precious Redeemer!](#)

Up Calvary's mountain, one dreadful morn,
Walked Christ my Savior, weary and worn;
Facing for sinners death on the cross,
That He might save them from endless loss.

Refrain

*Blessèd Redeemer! Precious Redeemer!
Seems I now see Him on Calvary's tree;
Wounded and bleeding, for sinners pleading,
Blind and unheeding-dying for me!*

"Father forgive them!" thus did He pray,
Even while His lifeblood flowed fast away;
Praying for sinners while in such woe
No one but Jesus ever loved so.

Refrain

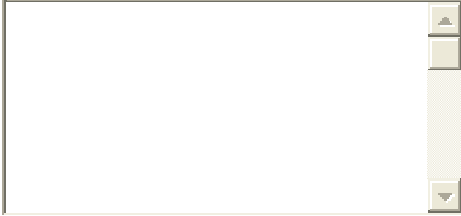
O how I love Him, Savior and Friend,
How can my praises ever find end!
Through years unnumbered on heaven's shore,
My tongue shall praise Him forevermore.

Jesus "prayed for sinners while in such woe," and what did He pray? "Father forgive them..."

Next, please examine this final passage:

¹⁴ For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. Matthew 6:14-15

Question 8. In Matthew 6:14-15 quoted above, upon what does Jesus make our own forgiveness dependant?



In Matthew 6:14-15, Jesus states that our own forgiveness by God is conditional upon our forgiveness of others. This is a very strong statement, and it cannot be argued against, except by those who do not believe in the inerrancy of Scripture. Jesus plainly states that God will only forgive those who have forgiven others. This makes it imperative that we forgive others, and there is an urgency to the command.

The parable quoted above in Matthew 18:21-35 corresponds to this statement by Jesus, for the wicked servant would not forgive the debt of others, and therefore he was to be "thrown into jail and tortured."

Question 9. According to the above three points of forgiveness, do you currently have anyone that you need to forgive? If so, do you understand how to forgive and what that forgiveness includes? Do you understand the urgent nature of it? Please write your thoughts here:



Randall writes, *"Yes, yesterday I spent the day calling a few friends who I had harbored some anger against and asked them to forgive me, and I forgave them for what they did to me."*

If you wrote the name, or thought of a person from the question above, then Colossians 3:12-13 applies to you:

¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Colossians 3:12-13

Let me add here that while we often need to forgive other people, we never need to forgive God for the way He has treated us. The reality is that God cannot sin, and so God never needs forgiveness. Even if, like Naomi in Ruth chapter 1 declared, you feel that He has dealt harshly with you, it is true that His "harsh dealing" was exactly right for you, and was best in the long run. Even though it is a popular statement coming from the psychological community that we must "forgive God," the truth is

that God has not sinned against us in any way, nor can He. It is completely backward to say that we must forgive God; rather, as sinners, we are in need of God to forgive us.

Today we have studied about the importance of forgiveness when it comes to removing bitterness. We have seen how to weigh others' sins against us properly, by comparing them to our sins against God, and we have seen that our own forgiveness from God is dependant upon our forgiving those who sin against us. Finally, we have seen three points to forgiveness that should help us to know how to practically forgive others.

In the next lesson, we will see some positive actions to take toward removing bitterness, all of which flow right from the cross of Calvary.

Question 10. What final thoughts or questions do you have after completing today's lesson? Please write them here:



To read some practical suggestions on the subject of forgiveness, [click here](#).

Ben wrote, "This lesson was definitely needed, as stated by many of those taking the course currently. It covers forgiveness perfectly and biblically! I am looking forward to the next lessons. May Christ continue to be the center of it all!"