

The believer's forgiveness

ODCC 29/06/09 (x.pages)

Text: Matthew 6:5-15; 18:21-35

Introduction

1. Last week we looked at God's forgiveness and saw that...
 - a. God's forgiveness is great – it's not a small thing for God to forgive especially when we consider the seriousness of sin.
 - b. Sins differ in their seriousness in terms of the effect and harm they have, i.e. murder is more devastating than stealing a ball point pen from the office but all sin is a result of a heart problem and so each sin is serious since God judges the heart more than the action (hate = murder, lust = adultery according to Jesus)
 - c. God's forgiveness is free to the one who is forgiven (cf Luke 7:42) however it came at a great cost and God paid the price through His son, Jesus.
2. This week I want to look at the requirement of the believer to forgive.
 - a. The Bible has a lot to say about us forgiving those who wrong us. We do not have time to look at all the scriptures but I challenge you to get out your concordance and look up all the scriptures that instruct us about forgiving those who sin against you and most of those are commanded by the Lord.

Not easy

1. The first thing I want to say is that developing forgiveness in our character is not easy. In *my* experience I have found that forgiving those who wronged me is one of the hardest things.
 - a. But as I've already stated, the emphasis that God has placed on it shows how important it is that I do forgive.
 - b. In fact, both our readings indicate that if we do not forgive then we might forfeit God's forgiveness.
 - c. Matt 6:14 says, "*If you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*"
2. We might be inclined to think that God can do anything therefore it is a small thing for God to forgive. He is omnipotent – it's well within His capability. It's far harder to create a universe than to forgive a sin yet God easily created the universe so how easy for Him to forgive.
 - a. Whereas *I* find it difficult making my bed every morning so forgiving someone is almost impossible (I say "almost" because if God commands it then it's not impossible).
 - b. At the risk of repeating some of last week's message let me say that it was not easy for God to forgive for two reasons:
 - i. The first is that God is just. The penalty for sin is death and so God did not have a right to simply forgive sin by overlooking it.
 - ii. To solve this God was willing to take the blame for my sin and also to take the punishment so that forgiveness is offered as a gift to anyone willing to receive it.
 - iii. Jesus demonstrated how difficult it was as He sweat drops of blood in the Garden of Gethsemane and cried out to God: "*Father, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not my will but yours be done*" (Matt 26:39).
 - c. The God of the universe – the creator and sustainer of all things – humbled Himself by becoming one of us; He suffered rejection, opposition, abuse and death at the hands of those He came to save and on the cross He sees those who are responsible for His crucifixion and says, "Father, forgive them..."
3. It is not easy for us to forgive but as I said, we need to develop an attitude of forgiveness as part of our character – it should become a characteristic of mine to easily forgive.
 - a. Forgiveness comes from the heart and with the Lord in my heart, He makes it possible for me to genuinely forgive.
 - b. There are some things we need to do to be able to forgive, remembering that forgiveness on our part is a requirement – an obligation – God expects; God demands that we forgive.

How to develop forgiveness

1. We need to develop an appreciation of God's forgiveness towards us. I don't know if we'll ever fully appreciate how much it cost the Lord to be able to forgive, nor how much He has forgiven us.
 - a. Thank God, the church has preached Grace for the last 500 years – it has emphasised grace rather than judgement, and so it should.

- b. But, unfortunately, we are so saturated with Grace that we little appreciate the seriousness of our sinfulness, and because we so little appreciate our sinfulness, we also do not appreciate the love and mercy of God.
 - c. That is what Paul tried to address from time to time and it is almost the entire theme of the little epistle of James (thought to be James the brother of Jesus). You and I should pray and ask God to show us just a little of what our hearts are really like so that we can see how merciful and forgiving He is.
2. As in our parable, if we get a glimpse of how much God has forgiven us so that we literally gasp at our HUGE DEBT He has written off, then we would see how small a debt we are required to forgive in others.
 - a. God has forgiven me an ocean of debt and I am required to forgive someone a bucket of debt.
 - b. *“How many times should I forgive someone? Seven times?”* asks Peter. *“No,”* says Jesus, *“but seventy times seven.”* (Matt 18:22).
 3. Another thing that helps is this. Is it not true that we are inclined to judge people and as if we were perfect?
 - a. Jesus says, *“Don’t say to your brother, ‘Let me take the splinter out of your eye,’ when you actually have a beam in your own eye.”*
 - b. How false is our sense of justice when we excuse or minimise our own sin. Has anyone sinned against me and needs my forgiveness? Yes. Have I sinned against anyone and need their forgiveness? Yes.
 - c. A human weakness is that we can’t see our own weakness but we easily see weakness in others.

The price

1. I’ve said that forgiveness comes at a price. It cost God to be able to forgive. So what is the cost to us?
 - a. The first thing I need to realise is that all sin is ultimately against God. After David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then had her husband murdered, when he repented David prayed, *“Against you and you alone have I sinned.”*
 - b. Although we may feel pain and loss because we are, as it were, at the receiving end, ultimately it is God who has been wronged. If I hurt you and ask forgiveness and you refuse and I ask God forgiveness, God will not refuse if my confession is sincere.
2. And as we have already seen, my debt which God has cancelled is infinitely smaller than the debt owing to me so if God forgives me I ought to forgive those who sin against me.
 - a. As my Father He wants me to be like Him, to be loving and forgiving.
 - b. If anything is owing because of a sin against me and I am able to forgive, God will make it up to me because that’s the kind of God we serve.
3. And if there is a price to pay, it is the price of humility. James says, *“Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up”* ().
 - a. I was puzzled over this verse for many years asking God how it was possible to humble oneself before Him. If I declared to God that I was nothing and allowed people to walk over me to prove how humble I was, would that not be false humility?
 - b. Then God showed me very clearly, we humble ourselves in situations just like this where, even though I’ve been hurt, and may have suffered loss, and been humiliated and wronged, I am able to say, *“I forgive you,”* and mean what I say.
 - c. To walk away from the small debt which is owed me because I have been forgiven a far larger debt.

Conclusion