

READ: PROVERBS 19:11

IMPORTANT: Whether the offense is big or small, forgiveness is a process that only God can accomplish in us. Forgiveness is beyond us – it is the work of God in us. Overlooking a transgression is to look beyond the transgression. As we forgive, we bring glory to God, for we are never more like God than when we forgive.

I. THE PRINCIPLE PART OF FORGIVENESS

Throughout the Scriptures we are taught three basic principles of forgiveness:

A. PRINCIPLE 1: FORGIVE THOSE WHO SIN AGAINST US

READ: MATTHEW 6:12; 18:21

To forgive completely requires one of the most difficult of all adjustments, but Jesus describes it so simply. Just as we need forgiveness, so we must forgive others. Forgiving others bears witness to the power of God over the worst that life can deal.

B. PRINCIPLE 2: FORGIVE AND BE FORGIVEN

READ: MATTHEW 6:14; LUKE 6:37

“We need not climb up into heaven to see whether our sins are forgiven. Let us look into our hearts and see if we can forgive others.” – Thomas Watson

IMPORTANT: All people are on common ground as sinners in need of God’s forgiveness. If we don’t forgive others, we are in fact denying and rejecting God’s forgiveness of us (see Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13).

C. PRINCIPLE 3: DON’T FORGIVE AND YOU WON’T BE FORGIVEN

READ: MATTHEW 6:15; MARK 11:25

There are petitions for the believer to ask from God, but there are also conditions for the answers to be received.

PASTORAL NOTE: If a person becomes bitter and angry over a wrong done, prayer is impossible. God wants us to deal with our “horizontal” relationships in order to have a clear “vertical” relationship (see also Matthew 5:23-24).

IMPORTANT: For a person to pray while bearing a grudge is like a tree sprouting leaves and bearing no fruit (Mark 11:13). True faith changes the heart. Real prayer dismantles pride and vengeance, filling the holes with love. Real faith seeks peace. For our churches to have prayer power, there must be harmony and forgiveness evident in the body of believers. **Let go of hurts, abandon grudges, and forgive others.**

As principle-centered people, we are called upon again and again to forgive. The principles of forgiveness are given priority throughout the scriptures to be placed into practice.

II. THE PARABLE PART OF FORGIVENESS

Jesus reminds us of the practice of forgiveness through parables. In two parables Jesus points us to forgive like God and not like man. Someone has said, “We are never more like God than when we can forgive others.”

A. FORGIVING LIKE GOD – THE PRODIGAL SON

READ: LUKE 15:18-20

Jesus shows us the heart of the one who is willing to forgive – eager, not reluctant – he doesn’t even wait for the sinner to get home.

Jesus shows us the heart of the Father who forgives – eagerly, totally forgive (not just tolerate), and forgive lavishly.

B. UNFORGIVING LIKE MAN – THE UNFORGIVING SERVANT

READ: MATTHEW 18:26-30

Man nurses grudges, and God eagerly forgives and restores.

Man keeps score, God totally and lavishly forgives and forgets.

III. THE PERSONAL PART OF FORGIVENESS

Taking the principles and parables we come to the personal part of forgiveness. It is not enough to have some good rules and a nice story or two – forgiveness is personal.

A. PHILEMON IN PANORAMA (BRIEF)

1. Philemon was saved through the ministry of Paul.
2. Philemon was a slave owner, a common practice in Paul’s day.
3. Onesimus was a slave of Philemon’s and he stole from Philemon, running away to Rome (verse 17).
4. Onesimus encounters Paul and is led to salvation (verse 10).
5. Onesimus is sent back to Philemon with letter in hand (verse 12).

B. PHILEMON IN PURPOSE

Forgiveness seems to be the over-arching purpose for personal application in the book of Philemon, though other purposes can be viewed.

1. Purpose of the Nature of Christian Love – Forgiveness is fleshed out by love.
2. Purpose of the Providential Care of God – Forgiveness is one of the great acts of God’s care.
3. Purpose of the Principles for Christian Relations – Forgiveness reconciles and restores relations.

C. PHILEMON IN PERSONAL

In the next three lessons, forgiveness is going to be personalized in the way of...

1. Character of Forgiveness – what is the character of one who forgives.
2. Action of Forgiveness – what action is needed to forgive.
3. Motivation of Forgiveness – what motivates a person to forgive.

As you can tell, forgiveness is going to be brought to the forefront of our lives with the hopes that we will become more like God and forgive.

READ: PROVERBS 19:11

Proverbs 19:11 (KJV) – *The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression.*

Proverbs 19:11 (AMP) – *Good sense makes a man restrain his anger, and it is his glory to overlook a transgression or an offense.*

Proverbs 19:11 (The Message) – *Smart people know how to hold their tongue; their grandeur is to forgive and forget.*

You may be familiar with the 1995 movie titled “Dead Man Walking.”

- A Catholic Nun bases the movie upon the book of the same title by the name of Helen PreJean.
- In the movie, which I have not seen but I have heard about, the figure of Matthew Poncelet is on death row for the brutal murders a teenage couple.
- The character is based upon the life Robert Lee Willie.

Debbie Morris was one of the surviving victims of Robert Lee Willie and Joseph Vaccaro.

- She and her boyfriend were abducted and after being beaten they left Mark, Debbie's boyfriend in the woods to die.

- Thirty hours they kept Debbie, raping and abusing her.

At one point Debbie begged them to kill her and end her misery.

- They ended up releasing her.
- Robert Lee Willie and Joseph Vaccaro were captured, tried and convicted.
- Robert Lee was put to death by lethal injection, while Joseph Vaccaro continues to serve a life sentence in a prison in Colorado.

Debbie Miller has written a book titled, “Forgiving the Dead Man Walking” that tells of the process of forgiving Robert Lee Willie and Joseph Vaccaro for her brutal abduction and repeated raping at the age of 16.

On the radio program, Focus on the Family, James Dobson asked Debbie Morris, “Have you completely forgiven Robert Lee Willie and Joseph Vaccaro?”

- To that, Debbie Morris replied,
 - *“I have. I have completely forgiven Robert Lee Willie and Joseph Vaccaro for what they did to me.*
 - *“And as my daughters grow up I am sure I will have to forgive them in areas I am not aware of at the moment.*
 - *“But Jesus Christ makes the difference and I have and will be able to forgive.”*

- (This is not a direct quote ... but several statements combined).

When one hears of Debbie Miller forgiving these men, no doubt one's first thought is: *"I can't begin to understand what it would take to forgive in that capacity."*

- But then we realize that outside of God we cannot understand forgiveness period.

IMPORTANT: Whether the offense is big or small, forgiveness is a process that only God can accomplish in us. Forgiveness is beyond us – it is the work of God in us.

It has been said that people pay attention to sermons on forgiveness more so than any other subject preached upon.

- Why is that?
 - Perhaps because we recognize our need of forgiveness, as well our need to forgive.

Solomon in his God-given wisdom speaks to the realm of forgiveness as he declares the beauty and honor of being able to forgive.

Proverbs 19:11 (DARBY) – *The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, and his glory is to overlook a transgression.*

Overlooking a transgression is to look beyond the transgression.

As we forgive we bring glory to God, for we are never more like God than when we forgive.

Tonight I wanted to introduce the subject of forgiveness in the New Testament book of Philemon.

- From this study we will look into the character, action and motivation of forgiveness.
- But before we jump into the study of this small book I want us to look at the “Parts of Forgiveness”...
 - **The Principle, the Parable and the Personal parts of forgiveness.**

I. THE PRINCIPLE PART OF FORGIVENESS

Throughout the Scriptures we are taught three basic principles of forgiveness.

A. PRINCIPLE 1: FORGIVE THOSE WHO SIN AGAINST US

READ: MATTHEW 6:12; 18:21

Matthew 6:12 (NLT) – *And forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us.*

Matthew 18:21 – *Then Peter came to Him and said, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?”*

To forgive completely requires one of the most difficult of all adjustments, but Jesus describes it so simply. Just as we need forgiveness, so we must forgive others.

- You were abused and abandoned. *Can you forgive the abuser?*
- You were the victim of political oppression or military terror. *Can you forgive those who inflicted the pain?*
- You thought it was love, but the object of your love has found another. *Can you ever forgive that person?*

Jesus knows our hurts and wounds.

- Through the tears, God's love begins to heal.
- That's why forgiveness is complicated but simple.
- And it's always the direction God wants your heart to turn, never toward revenge or hate.

Forgiving others bears witness to the power of God over the worst that life can deal.

B. PRINCIPLE 2: FORGIVE AND BE FORGIVEN

READ: MATTHEW 6:14; LUKE 6:37

Matthew 6:14 *For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.*

Luke 6:37 *Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.*

“We need not climb up into heaven to see whether our sins are forgiven. Let us look into our hearts and see if we can forgive others.”

- Thomas Watson

Jesus gave a startling warning about forgiveness: If we refuse to forgive others, God will also refuse to forgive us.

- This does not refer to salvation because salvation is not dependent on anything people can do.
- The foundation of God's forgiveness builds upon his own character.
- In love he regards the death of Christ as sufficient to pay our penalty.

Forgiving others is not a meritorious work for earning salvation.

- However, living in relationship with God requires constant repentance of the sins that plague us.
- Because believers must come to God constantly for confession and forgiveness, refusing to forgive others reveals a lack of appreciation for the mercy received from God.

IMPORTANT: All people are on common ground as sinners in need of God's forgiveness. If we don't forgive others, we are in fact denying and rejecting God's forgiveness of us (see Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13).

Ephesians 4:32 – *And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.*

Colossians 3:13 (TEV) – *Be tolerant with one another and forgive one another whenever any of you has a complaint against someone else. You must forgive one another just as the Lord has forgiven you.*

C. PRINCIPLE 3: DON'T FORGIVE AND YOU WON'T BE FORGIVEN

READ: MATTHEW 6:15; MARK 11:25

Matthew 6:15 – *But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

Mark 11:25 – *But when you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too.*

The sin of an unforgiving heart and a bitter spirit (Hebrews 12:15) forfeits blessing and invites judgment.

- Even the Talmud taught that he who is indulgent toward others' faults will be mercifully dealt with by the Supreme Judge (**Shabbath 151 b**).

Every believer must seek to manifest the forgiving spirit of Joseph (**Genesis 50:19-21**) and of Stephen (**Acts 7:60**) *as often as needed* (**Luke 17:3-4**).

- To receive pardon from the perfectly holy God and then to refuse to pardon others when we are sinful men is the epitome of abuse of mercy.

- And *“judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment”* (James 2:13).

There are petitions for the believer to ask from God, but there are also conditions for the answers to be received.

- Even more, our prayers are to be primarily concerned with the exaltation of the name, kingdom, and will of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Prayer is primarily worship, which inspires thanks and personal purity.

In Mark 11:25, Jesus gave another condition for answered prayer, this one referring to believers’ relationships with others.

- He told the disciples that when they stood praying, if one of them held a grudge against someone, he ought to first forgive that person before praying.
- Standing was the common position for the Jews in prayer.

PASTORAL NOTE: If a person becomes bitter and angry over a wrong done, prayer is impossible. God wants us to deal with our “horizontal” relationships in order to have a clear “vertical” relationship (see also Matthew 5:23-24).

Why would this matter? Because all of us are sinners before God.

- Those who have access to him have it only because of his mercy in forgiving their sins.

- Believers should not come to God asking for forgiveness or making requests, all the while refusing to forgive others.
- To do so would be to reveal that they have no appreciation for the mercy they have received.
 - God will not listen to a person with such an attitude.
 - God wants those who are forgiven to forgive others.

Forgiving others is tough work – so much so that many people would rather do something totally distasteful, like run a mile uphill, shovel gravel all day, wash greasy pots, or clean diapers...

- **Anything but forgive that rotten, no-good scoundrel!**

IMPORTANT: For a person to pray while bearing a grudge is like a tree sprouting leaves and bearing no fruit (Mark 11:13). True faith changes the heart. Real prayer dismantles pride and vengeance, filling the holes with love. Real faith seeks peace. For our churches to have prayer power, there must be harmony and forgiveness evident in the body of believers. **Let go of hurts, abandon grudges, and forgive others.**

As principle-centered people, we are called upon again and again to forgive. The principles of forgiveness are given priority throughout the scriptures to be placed into practice.

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Jesus reminds us of the practice of forgiveness through parables. In two parables Jesus points us to forgive like God and not like man. Someone has said, “We are never more like God than when we can forgive others.”

A. FORGIVING LIKE GOD – THE PRODIGAL SON

READ: LUKE 15:18-20

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18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,

19 And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

20 And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

Jesus shows us the heart of the one who is willing to forgive – eager, not reluctant – he doesn't even wait for the sinner to get home.

Jesus shows us the heart of the Father who forgives – eagerly, totally forgive (not just tolerate), and forgive lavishly.

B. UNFORGIVING LIKE MAN – THE UNFORGIVING SERVANT

READ: MATTHEW 18:26-30

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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.

Man nurses grudges, and God eagerly forgives and restores.

Man keeps score, God totally and lavishly forgives and forgets.

Which parable reminds us of ourselves?

- Jesus puts our feet to the fire in these parables to force us to not just think about the principles of forgiveness – *but to forgive.*

III. THE PERSONAL PART OF FORGIVENESS

Taking the principles and parables we come to the personal part of forgiveness. It is not enough to have some good rules and a nice story or two – forgiveness is personal.

To help us personalize forgiveness we turn to the book of Philemon.

- Here forgiveness is brought and fleshed out in the human realm.
 - But then that is the purpose of the principles and parables – **to be enacted in our personal life.**

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