

Spiritual Growth Lessons

LESSON 12 of 32

FORGIVENESS

Our relationship with God is determined by our relationship with one another: *"If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"* (1 John 4:20).

God will treat us as we treat others: *"Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven"* (Luke 6:36-37).

One of the most serious problems that plague mankind is unforgiveness. Many people have all kinds of resentments and bitterness that they have allowed to build up inside them through the years. This is true even among Christians. This is a tremendous hindrance to those who would really seek to love others with the love of Jesus. Besides this, God will turn a deaf ear to our prayers if we harbor unforgiveness towards even just one person!



HOW OFTEN SHOULD WE FORGIVE

The "Lord's Prayer" was given unto us as a model prayer to be prayed daily! Included in this prayer are these words: *"For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you"* (Matthew 6:14).

Let's look at this verse in the Amplified Version, to get a fuller meaning: *". . . for if you forgive people their trespasses--that is, their reckless and willful sins, leaving them, letting them go and giving up resentment--your heavenly Father will also forgive you"* (Matthew 6:14, Amplified Bible). Then comes the warning:

"But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (verse 15).

Who are we to forgive? Everybody. Many people live in constant condemnation because they have been hurt by others and are not willing to forgive. The forgiveness Jesus is asking us to extend to others must be sincere. We must be willing to give up our resentment towards those who have hurt us.

WHY WE CAN FORGIVE

In Matthew 18:21-35, Jesus gave a parable that teaches us why we can forgive others. The parable was taught in answer to Peter's question, *"Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?"* It seems that Peter was keeping a careful count of how many times his brother had wronged him. He had in his mind that seven times should be the limit--and then he would get even with him in some way. How shocked he was when Jesus answered:

". . . I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven" (verse 22).



That is 490 times! Jesus really was not setting any limits. He was telling us that we must always be willing to forgive others. And there is a big reason why this should be easy. Jesus has forgiven us a great debt of sin.

"Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him which owed him ten thousand talents (at least 60 million US dollars). 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. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt" (Matthew 18:23-27).

In this parable, we are the servant who owed a great debt that we could not pay, and Jesus Christ is the lord who forgave that debt whenever we humbled ourselves before Him. We have experienced the wonderful feeling of having all of our sins forgiven, when we should have suffered because of them. The song says:

I should have been crucified,
I should have suffered and died,
I should have hung on the cross in disgrace,
But Jesus my Lord took my place.

The debt that He forgave was great, so we should be able to forgive others who owe us a lesser debt.

"But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants, which owed him an hundred pence (about 50 US dollars): and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellow-servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. 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: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (Matthew 18:28-35).

A person who holds grudges and unforgiveness in his heart has emotionally "been turned over unto the tormentors," because these things will eat like a cancer and destroy him. Forgiveness is the only cure for this kind of cancer.

THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS

"Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do . . ." (Luke 23:34).

These words were spoken by Jesus from the cross. What an example for us! Jesus must have been suffering tremendous physical pain. Yet the inner pain must have far outweighed that pain that was in His body. Among those who cried, "Crucify Him, crucify Him," were those that He had ministered unto. Yet there had been no gratefulness on their part for the healing of their bodies, or whatever need had been met by Jesus.

Who was Jesus forgiving when He prayed that prayer? Surely all who were responsible for His death and had wronged Him in any way. Who was responsible for the death of Jesus?

Judas, the religious leaders, Pilate, the Roman soldiers, and many others--including you and I: *"But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:5-6).*

Because He has forgiven us, we can and must forgive others: *"Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you so also do ye"* (Colossians 3:12-13). *ds*

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