

Salvation: God's Love Forever

Bethany Bible Church, Adult Sunday School Class, October 13, 2013

Forgiven . . . But Also Forgiving

As we consider the “wonders” of our salvation, we would all readily admit that one of the greatest of those wonders is the fact that we are ‘forgiven’ by God. There is no condemnation for those of us who are in Christ Jesus; and we now stand absolutely ‘clean’ in His sight.

But there’s another dimension of that particular “wonder” that we might easily forget--and that’s the way that our forgiveness obligates us to be forgiving to others. Perhaps no other passage of Scripture illustrates this obligation better than the parable our Lord told in Matthew 18. Jesus had just taught about how we are to deal graciously but resolutely with those in our midst who are ensnared in sin. Then--no doubt wondering how this might work out in actual experience--Peter had asked Him a great question: “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?”¹ And perhaps thinking that he was particularly generous, Peter offered a suggestion: “Up to seven times?” (Matthew 18:21). But Jesus must have greatly surprised him when He said, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven” (v. 22). Jesus didn’t mean that, when it got to the four-hundred-and-ninetieth time, we could call it quits and withhold forgiveness. Rather, He meant that we should forgive every time--and not even bother counting.

Then Jesus said; “Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, ‘Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.

“But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’ So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’ And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.” (vv. 23-34).

The debt owed to the servant was significantly less than the one he owed to his master. Similarly, God’s forgiveness of our infinitely greater debt to Him makes all other debts to us pale in comparison! Then Jesus added, “So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses” (v. 35). Our experience of God’s forgiveness, then, completely obligates us to be forgiving toward those who wrong us--no matter how great we feel that wrong to us might be.

I. CONSIDER OUR EXPERIENCE OF FORGIVENESS FROM THE FATHER.

- A. The place to begin is with the wonderful truth of our own forgiveness. What an infinitely complete forgiveness it is! Paul teaches us that our forgiveness is through Jesus Christ; and that “In Him we have redemption

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through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence . . .” (Ephesians 1:7-8). He willingly paid the complete price for our forgiveness; so that, as Paul says in Romans 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus . . .” “No condemnation” means that we are 100% righteous in His sight. Even when we stumble and fall--as we often do--forgiveness is still ours. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

- B. This is important to stress. Our sins before a holy God were sufficient to condemn us forever. God would have been perfectly just in doing so. But now, in Christ, we will find forgiveness every time we come to Him and ask. As great as our sin may be, His grace is always greater (Romans 5:20).

II. OUR FORGIVENESS OBLIGATES US TO FORGIVE OTHERS AS WE HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN.

- A. This means that we are unconditionally obligated to forgive others as we have been forgiven. In that great prayer that our Lord taught His followers to pray, He taught us to say, “And forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us” (Luke 11:4). Our readiness to forgive is assumed by Him. The apostle Paul also assumes this readiness when he says, “Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you (Ephesians 4:31-32). In another passage, he wrote that we were to be “bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do” (Colossians 3:13).
- B. This obligation is not to be merely a one-time-only thing with us; but is to be the regular pattern of life. To ‘forgive as we have been forgiven’ means, of course, that we take sin seriously. God does not offer forgiveness when sincere repentance is not present and forgiveness is not sought; and so, we’re not being called to ‘forgive’ where He Himself doesn’t forgive. But as if in recollection of Peter’s question, Jesus said, “Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him.” (Luke 17:3-4).

III. THE FREEDOM OF OUR FELLOWSHIP WITH OUR FATHER IS CONDITIONED ON OUR READINESS TO FORGIVE.

- A. To withhold that legitimate forgiveness from our brother or sister--when we ourselves have been forgiven for so much more--sets us at odds with our Father. In the Sermon on The Mount, Jesus must have known that people would be taken by surprise by the prayer, “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matthew 5:12)--knowing that we would be inclined to reverse the order of things; because . We would prefer to pray that we be enabled to forgive others as we ourselves have been forgiven. But Jesus said it the way He meant it. And after the prayer, He said, “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14-15). Later on in His ministry, Jesus said, “And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also

forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses” (Mark 11:25-26).

- B. We shouldn't take this to mean, however, that our salvation is taken away from us if we refused to forgive. It may be a sign that we have not truly experienced the redeeming grace of God; but it may also be a sign of disobedience in the heart of someone who truly is a child--a disobedient child, but a child nevertheless. Rather than a 'judicial' matter, this 'unforgiveness' from God should be seen more as a 'parental' matter. A child is still the child of his or her father--even if that child is disobedient. But the father's blessings will definitely be withheld--and a relationship with the father strained--until that child repents and obeys. Similarly, we are saved and are still the children of our heavenly Father; but we are not right with Him--and the full blessedness of a forgiven state before Him is withheld--until we make right with those who seek forgiveness from us! Until we forgive our repentant brother or sister, we are not right with our Father.

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May God help us, then, to be a people characterized by a readiness to forgive others. Surely the best place to start is to rest in--and rejoice in--the full forgiveness that the Father has granted us through faith in His Son Jesus Christ.

¹Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from The Holy Bible, New King James Version; copyright 1982, Thomas Nelson, Inc.