

CHRISTIAN FORGIVENESS

BIBLE TEXT : Matthew 5:23, 24, 43-48; 18:15, 21, 22; Mark 11:23-26; Romans 12:9,10,14,17,19-21.

LESSON 272 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14, 15).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Matthew 5:23-24

²³ Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;

²⁴ Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

Matthew 5:43-48

⁴³ Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

⁴⁴ But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

⁴⁵ That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

⁴⁶ For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?

⁴⁷ And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more *than others*? do not even the publicans so?

⁴⁸ Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

Matthew 18:15

¹⁵ Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

BIBLE REFERENCES:

I Complete Forgiveness

1. Forgiveness of our brother comes before reconciliation with God, Matthew 5:23, 24; 18:15; Mark 11:25, 26.
2. Unlimited forgiveness is necessary, Matthew 18:21, 22.
3. Faith channels must be clear to receive an answer from God, Mark 11:23-26.

II Pure Love

1. Have genuine love for the brethren, Romans 12:9, 10;
1 John 3:11-19

¹¹ For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

¹² Not as Cain, *who* was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.

¹³ Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.

¹⁴ We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not *his* brother abideth in death.

¹⁵ Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

¹⁶ Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren.

¹⁷ But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

¹⁸ My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

¹⁹ And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

1 John 4:7-11

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

⁸ He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

⁹ In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

¹⁰ Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

1 John 4:20

²⁰ 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 4:21

²¹ And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

2. Love your enemies, Matthew 5:43; Romans 12:14.

3. Render good for evil, Matthew 5:44; Romans 12:17, 19-21.

4. God loves sinners, Matthew 5:45-48;

Romans 5:8

Matthew 18:21-22

²¹ Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?
²² Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

Mark 11:23-26

²³ For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith.
²⁴ Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive *them*, and ye shall have *them*.
²⁵ And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.
²⁶ But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.

Romans 2:9-10

⁹ Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile;
¹⁰ But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile:

Romans 2:14

¹⁴ For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves:

Romans 2:17

¹⁷ Behold, thou art called a Jew, and restest in the law, and makest

⁸ But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were sinners, Christ died for us.

NOTES:

Reconciliation First

"If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matthew 5:23, 24).

Jesus here portrays an Israelite who, having brought his sacrifice to the Tabernacle, awaits the instant when the priest will approach to receive it at his hands. It is at this solemn moment, when about to seek in his offering a seal of divine forgiveness, that the offerer suddenly remembers that some brother has a complaint against him. What then? Is he to say, "As soon as I have offered this gift I will go straight to my brother, and make it up with him"? No, but before another step is taken — even before the offering is presented — this reconciliation is to be sought, though the gift be left unoffered before the altar.

Leaving your gift at the altar may be applied to a gift of service or a talent that is offered to the Lord. If you have something in your heart against somebody or if you are entertaining resentment or bitterness toward another, your work for God is fruitless. If you are singing, or praying, working in the church office, or preaching, and have anything in your heart against your brother, you might as well not be working for God. You have to be reconciled and get that cleared up before your gift is acceptable to God.

It is that little something that people hold in their heart that robs them of victory. That is what robs them of grace, power, and victory in their life, and they can never make progress in the Gospel until they bring it to the altar and leave it there. If one comes to the altar and remembers that his brother has ought against him, he must leave his gift before the altar, go and be reconciled to his brother, and then come and offer the gift, and then God will accept it.

Humility in Reconciliation

In connection with the thought of forgiveness, the Bible does not at all take into consideration, who, is in the wrong. The Word demands that restitution be made and reconciliation be effected at any cost. Sometimes it costs a lot to humble yourself before a brother or a sister, a neighbour, or a relative, and really reach the point where you will say: "Well, I thought I was right, but perhaps I was all wrong. I want forgiveness." It might be true that he has misinterpreted your motive and that what you did was done in good faith; but if it casts a stumbling block in someone's way, it is necessary that there be a reconciliation.

Forgiveness

An unforgiving spirit is a serious thing. Even though one may have been seriously wronged and may say that he is justified in entertaining hard feelings and ill will against someone, there is no place for a lack of forgiveness in the heart of a Christian. Jesus said: "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14, 15).

thy boast of God,

Romans 2:19-21

¹⁹ And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness,

²⁰ An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.

²¹ Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?

A Hindrance to Prayer

Certain people have handicaps that hinder their speech, or their hearing, or their eyesight, or their progress in walking. Sometimes people have things that hinder their prayers. "If ye do not forgive, neither will your Father, which is in heaven forgive your trespasses" (Mark 11:26). You may have faith to remove mountains, but your prayers will go unanswered unless you have a forgiving spirit. "When ye stand praying, forgive" — and then your faith will have a clear channel through which to receive an answer from God. The mountains will not move until you move that seed of discord. Just as a note struck in harmony will cause the strings of a piano to vibrate, so unity among the brethren will cause the Spirit of God to operate. You cannot be in tune with God and out of tune with your brother.

A Grudge

Sometimes people say or think that they have forgiven their brother, but in their hearts they nurse an old wound. Let the name of the one who has injured them come up, and immediately that old resentment shows itself. There will be a lack of confidence and he will say, "Well, he let me down once." Shall I forgive "till seven times?" asked Peter. Christ's emphatic reply was, "I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:21, 22).

Grace for Forgiveness

"If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him" (Luke 17:3, 4). Jesus did not teach toleration or leniency toward sinning one against another. If your brother trespass, rebuke him; if he repent, forgive him. And when you forgive him, then forget his sin. That takes grace. You will probably have to pray for enough grace to do that. You might forgive him once; then you might try your grace of forgiveness into forgiving the second time. And then if it happens the third time, you are not going to lose your grace altogether, are you? Would you answer the third request for forgiveness by saying, "I will not forgive"? If you feel you cannot forgive, you can get down and pray that God will give you sufficient grace. That is what is needed to obey the command of Jesus.

Gossip

The next time your brother trespass against you, you will know what to do: "rebuke him" — not with malice but with brotherly love. And if someone comes to you and trespasses against another brother by speaking against him, remember that is as serious as if he were speaking against you. Rebuke him! A listening ear is as bad as a loose tongue. Gossiping is sowing the seed of discord, and should be rebuked by those who hear it. The Lord hates him that "soweth discord among brethren" (Proverbs 6:19).

Perfect Love

It is easy to love some people. The publicans loved those who loved them. It is also easy to forgive some people — if they are our friends. But Jesus commands: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). Can you love the man who has lied about you, who has dragged your reputation into the dust? What about that man who

cheated you and then sneered at you? Can you forgive him? Do you do him good when the opportunity offers? or do you go around talking about him?

The next time you see your enemy in need, offer him a helping hand. You might think he will not accept your offer, but have you tried? You say he is a sinner — Jesus ate with publicans and sinners. God sends his rain upon the unjust. The sun shines just as brightly for sinners as for saints. If you are good only to your friends, wherein do you differ from the publicans? "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Mathew 5:48).

One Who Forgave

The power of the Gospel to change the human heart and to plant in it the spirit of forgiveness is most wonderfully exemplified in the life story of an ex-convict known for many years as "Forty-five." Few, perhaps, have had to forgive the degree of injury that this man did.

At the age of sixteen, he left his home in Providence, Rhode Island, and drifted west. One night he came into the city of Tacoma in a boxcar, reaching there just when a murder had been committed. He was arrested, tried, and sentenced to twenty-five years at hard labour.

For years he suffered all the severity of punishment that would be meted out to a desperate criminal. At the end of twenty-one years he was discharged from the prison "nearly wrecked in body and mind, homeless, friendless, and nameless." He was given a ticket to Portland. For four days he wandered about Portland looking for work, with nothing to eat nor a place to sleep. At last he started down to the old Burnside Bridge to throw himself into the river. Pulling him down from the railing, the bridge-keeper said, "You cannot do that." As "Forty-five" walked away he saw the Apostolic Faith sign. In the church he felt he was among friends.

The minister was preaching that night about the prodigal son. At the close, Forty-five held up his hand for prayer and went to the altar, where he prayed; and God "washed his soul as white as snow." One night while he was telling the story of his life and conversion a man sat listening in the back of the church. He got up and ran down the stairs. One who had talked with the stranger told Forty-five that this man knew something about him.

Forty-five followed the man to San Francisco where he found him in the City and County Hospital. He went to the superintendent of the hospital and asked for work. When asked where he had been previously employed, he breathed a prayer to God and told his story. The superintendent wept as he listened. He held out his hand to Forty-five and told him to report for duty.

When the opportunity came to contact this stranger, he found him suffering from tuberculosis of the spinal column. Asked to read the Bible, Forty-five read to him of the Prodigal Son. While talking, the man put his arm around the ex-convict and asked, "Can you forgive me the wrong I have done you?" The ex-convict replied: "You have done me no wrong. Can you tell me about my mother?" He said, "I know nothing about your people, but I am the man who committed the crime that you were sent to the penitentiary for." He said, "I want you to forgive me for the years that you spent behind the walls of the penitentiary."

Here was the real murderer for whose crime Forty-five had spent twenty-one long years in the prison! And he was asking Forty-five to forgive him. The thoughts of the ex-convict went back to the long years he had spent in the prison. He thought of

the ball and chain he carried for two years. He thought of the thirty lashes he had received at the whipping post, and of the time he was shot in the leg, and of the weeks spent in the old dungeon. He felt that he was not prepared to forgive from his heart. He left the man and went into a little room alone. He locked the door, and kneeling down on the concrete floor he prayed. For nearly three hours he forgot everything else and talked and prayed and wrestled with God for a real spirit of forgiveness. At last a voice said, "Forgive him for My sake."

He went back and took the man in his arms and said, "I forgive you all the injuries you have done me, but you will have to ask God to forgive you, too."

Over and over Forty-five could hear him say, "God, be merciful to me a sinner." And God had mercy and saved him. A few days later the criminal died in the arms of the man who forgave so much.

Since then Forty-five has gone on to be with the Lord; and in eternity, with a "new name," and no longer just a number, he will meet on the streets of gold the man who caused him such suffering. Both have received the pardon of a merciful God.

QUESTIONS

1. How many times should a man forgive his brother?
2. How are we to treat our enemies?
3. What is God's attitude toward sinners in this life?
4. What Scriptures show that unforgiveness hinders our prayers?
5. What should you do when someone is angry with you?
6. How can brotherly love be demonstrated?
7. How should a Christian's love differ from that of sinners?
8. To whom doth vengeance belong?
9. What is meant by "Let love be without dissimulation"?