

## WHAT JESUS TAUGHT ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS 2: FORGIVING OTHERS

(Taken and adapted from 'The Red Bits – A Study Guide' by Michael Button)

**Introduction.** The word *Gospel* means 'Good News.' The message that Jesus brought to men and women was, and still is, good news, for at the heart of the Gospel is the good news that God forgives sinners. Since all have sinned and the outcome of sin is death, to learn that our sins can be forgiven by God is most welcome news indeed. The realisation of what we owe from this gracious mercy shown to us by our loving Heavenly Father, ought to motivate us to be forgivers too.

**1. Forgive us as we forgive others.** A request for forgiveness is included in the model prayer Jesus taught His disciples: *Forgive our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*<sup>1</sup> Praying for forgiveness prevents us from taking it for granted, for there are conditions of repentance and faith (more on this in a later Study). Notice two things about this short petition: that Jesus refers to sin here as *debts*, and that it is related to our forgiving others. Every sin we commit is a debt to God, for He paid for our sins in giving us His Son to die for our redemption.

Activity 1: Read the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant in Matt 18:23-35, then match the characters from the Parable with those they represent.

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| (a) The king .   | [ ] |
| (b) The servant with a debt to the king.                 | [ ] |
| (c) The fellow servant with a debt to the first servant. | [ ] |
| (d) The first servant's debt.                            | [ ] |
| (e) The second servant's debt.                           | [ ] |

- 1 God
- 2 The hurt done to us by someone
- 3 Sin
- 4 Someone who has hurt or upset us
- 5 You and me

The figures Jesus used in the parable are significant. The 10,000 talent debt was vastly more than an individual (certainly a servant) could ever pay back, whereas the 100 denarii was about three months' pay at the minimum wage. William Barclay calculates this as a ratio of approximately 500,000:1.<sup>2</sup> The point of this wide disparity in debts is that God has forgiven us something we could never repay and that is exceedingly beyond what others might have done to us.

Activity 2: What affect might unwillingness to forgive have on our:

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<sup>1</sup> Matt 6:12. Usually rendered "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

<sup>2</sup> William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible –Matthew Vol 2*, page 194.

- (a) Being forgiven by God? (*read* Matt 6:14-15 and Luke 6:37).
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- (b) Our prayers? (*read* Mark 11:25).
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## 2. Sin against God and sins against us

We can, and should, forgive others for the hurt they cause us, but only God can forgive sin, since all sin is basically disobedience to God. King David recognised this when he had committed adultery and murder, which violated the morality of Bathsheba and the life of her husband (*read* Psalm 51:4). Jesus, of course, is able to forgive sin, because He is the Son of God.<sup>3</sup>

Activity 3: What did Jesus say to each of the following regarding sin?

The woman who anointed Jesus' feet (*read* Luke 7:48).

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A man healed at the Pool of Bethesda (*read* John 5:14).

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The woman taken in adultery (*read* John 8:11).

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The man lowered down through the roof (*read* Matt 9:2).

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**3. Real forgiveness.** Forgiveness does not mean ignoring the sin, pretending it does not exist. For God to do this would be leaving the person still in his or her sin that might lead to death.<sup>4</sup> For us to do so would be living in pretence.

If we forgive someone for the hurt they have done us, it means we shall not hold it against them, insist on any recompense, or reduce our obligation to love and compassion.

**4. Seeking Forgiveness.** We should also seek forgiveness from others we have hurt (*read* Matt 5:23-24). Jesus put this in the context of bringing an offering to God, because forgiveness has to do with relationship. If our relationship with others is out of order, then our relationship with God will be out of order, for He wants us to be right with our brothers and sisters in the Lord inasmuch as it depends on us. It is down to us to ensure that we have not given cause to break relationship, or if it has broken, to seek to restore it

**5. Repentance and Forgiveness.** Repentance is a prerequisite to forgiveness, whether it is God forgiving our sin or ourselves forgiving others for the hurt done to us (*read* Luke 17:3-4). Note that 'seven times' is not meant to be a maximum, for elsewhere Jesus said to forgive *seventy times seven*, which is, in effect, saying not

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<sup>3</sup> Mark 2:1-12.

<sup>4</sup> Rom 6:23.

to keep a tally of the number of times someone causes you hurt, for indeed we should not deliberately hoard memories of sins done against us.

Activity 4: Which of the following are true?

- (a) The way we forgive affects the way God forgives us.
- (b) As long as we forgive others, it should not matter to us that we have the forgiveness of others.
- (c) We must forgive others whether they repent or not.
- (d) Forgiveness has to do with relationship.
- (e) It is impossible to forgive if the hurt goes too deep.

Activity 5 To think about: Is there a connection between love and forgiveness? If so, how does one affect the other?