

LESSON 5



EXCEPT YE FORGIVE OTHERS

Scripture Texts: Matthew 6:12-15; Luke 6:36-37, 17:3-4; Romans 12:19-20; Ephesians 4:32

Most agree it is right to forgive. Many wish they could. Some do. How is forgiveness brought about? Forgiveness is conditional. Many people find it too difficult to forgive others and thus find themselves unable to obtain forgiveness from God.

MEMORY VERSE: *But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Matthew 6:15*

Forgiveness Is Dependent

Since all have sinned, all need forgiveness. When one sees his sin through the Spirit's convincing power and yields to the Father's drawing and repents, he craves forgiveness. God is ready to give it. Why then are some not forgiven? Forgiveness is conditional. Jesus said so. God can forgive only a heart that is willing to forgive.

To be forgiven one must be willing to forsake all sin. A grudge, hatred, desire for revenge, bitterness—these are sins. An unforgiving heart is closed. God can put His forgiveness into an open heart only. God's purpose in doing a work in our hearts is to make us like Him. He is loving, merciful, and forgiving. If He is not allowed to make us like that, He can do nothing at all. Such an one remains unforgiven, unsaved, without hope of Heaven.

Ability to Forgive

Jesus is our example. On the Cross He forgave His murderers. We will not have more to forgive than He. We will have His help in doing it. Unsaved persons cannot muster a forgiving attitude, but they must have a willingness to give God opportunity to help them to forgive.

All suffer injuries at times. Sometimes we may rebuke the offender, point out his offense. If he repents, forgive him. If he does not repent, forgive him. He cannot receive this forgiveness until he comes and asks for it. Our watching must be of self rather than of the other fellow, as we are admonished in Luke 17:3 to take heed to ourselves.

Forgiveness does not bring about a bad memory. We will not forget the act, but we will not remember the wrong. We will not hold a judging and condemning attitude. We bury it with never a thought of digging it up again, ever.

Response to Injuries

Romans 12:19-20 gives us good instruction. Vengeance and the love of God do not dwell in a heart at the same time. A desire to get even, to pay back a wrong, is sinful. To do kindness to the offender is right and blesses doubly. (1) It nourishes the love and forgiveness in the offended one's heart. (2) It persuades toward repentance in the heart of the offender. The coals of fire on his head mean conviction in his heart. No vindictive punishment could produce

this.

Give place unto wrath—give way or yield before the wrath of an enemy rather than to retaliate. Wrath is a work of the flesh that will keep one from the Kingdom of God (Galatians 5:20-21). We cannot afford to harbor it. Adam Clarke suggested this means to leave the matter to civil law and to God to judge and punish. Or "yield a little to a man when in a violent passion, for the sake of peace, until he grows cooler." The very fact that we have been forgiven creates in us a desire to forgive.

Effects of an Unforgiving Spirit

People who refuse to forgive hold resentment, bitterness, and revenge against others. In some cases people hold unforgiveness toward God. Their lives are void of the joy and peace that only God can supply. They are misfits in the congregation. They are of no help in God's service. They are the cause of evil gossip. Their speech and actions are affected by their unforgiveness. We must never ask ourselves if they deserve forgiveness.

None of us were deserving of God's forgiveness. God did not give us justice, He gave us forgiveness. We are to forgive because we have received forgiveness. We are to forgive because God forgives. He is our example. His nature is ours if we are His children. "Except" we forgive our brother, we cannot be forgiven.

JUST A THOUGHT

**No matter how long a fellow nurses a grudge,
it won't get better.**

This lesson is adapted from a lesson by Mary Lehmann.
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