



“The Art of Christian Confrontation” – Part 2

Matthew 18:21-35

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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Matthew 18:21-35 *Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often*

shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" 22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. 23 "Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 "And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. 25 "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. 26 "The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' 27 "Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. 28 "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!' 29 "So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' 30 "And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. 31 "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. 32 "Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. 33 'Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' 34 "And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. 35 "So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."

Having personally heard Jesus verbalize this entire passage, verses 1 through 35, Peter had some questions! After all, Jesus had been saying some hard stuff! Peter...desiring what we all seem to desire, wanted to *quantify* his standing with God...to measure and scale the issues of sin and forgiveness. We all want to know “how much?” *How much sin is bad? How much can we get away with and still be in good graces with God? How much forgiveness is necessary and how much do we have to forgive others in order to not “tip the balance” against us?*

Through his parable of the unforgiving servant, Jesus teaches that forgiveness is one of the defining characteristics of the kingdom. Therefore it is safe to say that such is mandatory for you and me to effectively be allowed on the field of play, and Jesus is calling us out to both receive and give forgiveness in order to enter into the kingdom of God and to participate in its attributes and blessings.

Forgiveness, being again a “defining characteristic,” is therefore a critical litmus test for all of us to illuminate our very *real* standing with God. Peter’s heart was not playing tricks on him! He seemed to innately understand the importance of this subject, and was righteously seeking answers.

How often we desire to receive from God, *and really, from others also*, what we are unwilling to offer ourselves. And then again, when we *do* move to act according to the directions of Christ, we tend to do so tacitly and without any real zeal and earnest. Much of the religious world simply attempts to *learn* this behavior instead of such occurring out of a life truly transformed...a “new creature” of thankfulness, saved by grace.

This account presents one of the greatest examples of such a dichotomy! For we well know that in our relationship with God, that forgiveness plays innately a ‘core’ principle as to what is occurring in the restoration of our personal being and standing with our Creator. Those of us that have experienced God’s salvation understand, at least on some rudimentary level, that in the act of redemption, we have been ‘forgiven of our sins.’

Two paths tend to present themselves herein: **One**, many of us that have lived fairly moralistic lives and do not have any bodies secretly buried someplace. We can therefore easily minimize the aspect of forgiveness because we can feel that we didn’t really have all that much to forgive. After all, we have been pretty good people and frankly didn’t really have *that* much to be forgiven for! But seldom will we speak that fact in the company of others! I mean, we know how that sounds even though we are sure that such is true. But such thinking reflects only our lack of understanding concerning sin and what sin really is and what sin really looks like.

The Bible tells us that “*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* (Romans 3:23) Sin, according to scripture, is more than just overt and blatant evils. No, the definition of ‘sin’ in scripture is a “missing the mark.” *What ‘mark?’* The ‘bar’...the standard of God’s holiness. “Less than perfect” you might say. You see, it takes only one sin to separate us from God, not to mention that we are born into this world with the guilt of the sin Adam and Eve! And because the perfect God dwells in perfection, anything less is a chasm of distance between us. One inch might as well be a thousand miles! So, the *amount* of sin doesn’t matter. The *seriousness* of the sin doesn’t matter. Total forgiveness is crucial to our being able to approach the living God and stand in His midst.

Secondly, there are those that have, in the past, actually embraced a life of sin and have a great deal of baggage coming into the fold. Ironically, these too can often take a self-righteous approach, but not for a perceived innocent life, but rather for the distance they have come from what they were. Far less consideration is given to *where they are now*, but rather only that they have come a long way from their old life, and that journey, instead of being humbling and awe inspiring toward the Savior, becomes an element of pride and self-righteousness. Judgment of others easily follows because the feeling is “*what’s wrong with you? I have come so far, why are you still where you are spiritually?*” We ‘self-judge’ ourselves higher than we are, not because of where we stand currently, but rather how far we have come from what we used to be.

Now any time we broach this subject of forgiveness, we are immediately confronted by both the horrors of this world and often the personal horrors that some of us have experienced at the hands of others. We know the world can be a very cruel and evil place at times, and the newspapers are full of accounts of murder, thefts, genocide, sexual predators and cruelty on every level. Auschwitz, Bosnia, Rwanda, Darfur, Aleppo, ISIS. Closer to home we see sexual exploitation and abuse of children, drive by shootings, broken homes, corporate thefts and cheating, racism, and governmental atrocities. Even closer up we see personal slander in social media, marital infidelity, lousy parenting, prevalence of lying, personal thefts, and lack of loyalty and commitment. No one would argue, that forgiveness can be one of the hardest things Jesus has ever asked us to do.

All of this would clearly lead us to truth that this is not Sunday School material, but rather the high reflection of our Redeemer, encompassing the call to ‘*be holy, as I am holy.*’ What should this servant be doing after his incredible debt is forgiven? He should be celebrating the King’s mercy. Instead, the story gets ugly. When his personal situation comes into play, he fails to make the connection to his own forgiveness, and grabs the man by the neck, and demands that he “*pays what he owes.*”

He further moves to throw the guy into jail until he makes things right! Of course the irony is that in jail the man would not be able to work and repay his debt. So he was stuck! That's what our unforgiveness does to others – it says, 'there is nothing you can ever do to make this right.' One has to entertain the idea that perhaps in a very real way, that was the point. I don't think the man's wrath was aimed at getting his money as much as it was just to render some serious hurt on this guy because he himself had been hurt.

There are a couple of other aspects that I need to mention in all of this. One, a passage in Luke shed's some detail to this subject. It says in Luke 17:3-4, that "...*If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him.*" Notice that it says we "must" forgive him...meaning Christ is not giving us an option, and does not provide for any 'special circumstances.' But it also says that the individual in question "repents," not just merely says "I'm sorry." After all, aren't we all "sorry?" That phrase has come to be devoid of all real meaning in our culture. Repentance means to 'turn away' from the path one was on, but we must also understand that such is not always an easy thing to do at the snap of one's fingers! Patience and endurance seems to be needed herein to see such through, but again, it is more than sitting back and allowing someone to run over you.

However, our defense cannot be unwillingness to be hurt or slighted, after all, Jesus *knew* that Peter was going to throw Him under the bus that day of His arrest, and did nothing to stop it. Jesus was *always* about what was best for the other person. Yet we cannot ignore this passage and how it speaks into this issue. We know that while Jesus will always love us, and forgiveness is always and forever available to us, there are things we can do to break fellowship with God and will cause a 'riff' in our connection to Him without repentance and seeking honest forgiveness for our actions. Just like with us in our life interactions with God, there must be action on our part to make things right with each other.

So, if the person is unwilling to "repent," am I off the hook? No, not necessarily. Because with or without the active participation of the offending individual, the lack of forgiveness on our part can cause some serious side effects toward ourselves and others around us who are innocent bystanders in the whole matter. Meaning that, if I fail to make things right in my own heart toward the individual, bitterness and ungodly actions and mind is sure to overcome us, and suddenly *we're* actively sinning toward that individual, and often our 'mood' on the matter hurts the others around us...friends, family and unredeemed co-workers, etc.

Mark 11:25 says "*And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.*" Colossians 3:12-13 says also "*Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.*" And Ephesians 4:26 to "*Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger...*" So clearly, we forgive not just for the benefit of the other person or even for the sake of our God's directives, but also for our own benefit and peace!

This is a very real issue in this matter. For I have many times witnessed the all-encompassing aspect of an individuals unforgiveness toward another. The offending person, as we discussed last week, may or may not even know that they have slighted you in some manner, and having by-passed the step-by-step directions previously given for us to follow, now we are lost in a unilateral impasse. We didn't follow last week's directives and because of such we now have become bitter, angry, and blind to the original problem or how to rectify it. We essentially become the "Hatfields and McCoys" and often we don't even remember what we are angry about or we have altered its reality in our hearts to justify our continued angst toward them.

Left to fester, this situation goes from bad to worse, and begins to corrupt our whole walk with God and our relationships with others. In the end we are left spiritually impotent and unhappy, reflective of a corrupted faith, and portraying a personality of God that is wholly false and damaging to His reputation. Essentially, you are 'kicking Jesus to the curb,' in your zeal for self-vindication and desire for retribution. I have seen this consume

a person more times than I care to admit, and I have subsequently watched those individuals shrink away to obscurity. So, the fact is, often forgiveness is necessary for our own good and for the street-cred of Jehovah God.

Satan tries unceasingly to get us into these situations for the reasons I have already mentioned, as he is the embodiment of this phenomena. Satan tried to usurp the authority and dominion of God and he got tossed out of the club for it. And now...even though he innately knows that the end will not go well for him, he fights on to wreak as much havoc and damage as possible. We humans so easily can follow in those same footsteps, and so full of hatred that all that matters is to exude as much damage as possible on the individual we have marked as our nemesis.

I have found that those who reside here in the Midwest can often be the most susceptible to this, and are quite willing to 'shoot themselves in the foot to spite their face.' As long as we can "win" in our own minds we will spiritually sacrifice our own children, our church family, our marriages, our friends and our reputation in the Christian community. We want to win at all costs, even if such leaves us bloody, alone, and without a trophy!

When it comes to forgiveness, we often make the mistake of focusing on those who wronged us. We make it about them. Are they truly sorry? Have they felt enough pain? Have they said and done the right things to deserve our forgiveness? But the reality is that there are people in my life who have hurt me. Some won't acknowledge it; some will never come and ask for my forgiveness. Does that give me license to be bitter and angry and unforgiving? It does not, and ironically in the end, if I fail herein, *they* will be the victor because I am the one most hurt but by my own actions, not theirs.

Matthew 5:21-24 says "*You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.*"

Let us not leave this issue without allowing those last sentences to wash over us. Verses 33- 35 says '*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. "So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."* Please note that this was JESUS saying this! This is a serious factor in our walk, and it would behoove us to listen up and deal with this subject. For this remains a subject that is consistently and regularly 'taking people out.'

I wish that men's hearts were better, and the tendency toward abuse of this area was behind us. It is clear from the scriptures that those who grasp the gospel and have so embraced their redemption...acknowledging their sinfulness and guilt, they will embrace this teaching. If we are unable, perhaps we need to re-evaluate whether we have been truly reborn and do indeed have a new heart? I cannot *teach* you to successfully and honestly do these things unless you have truly been transformed by Christ. And if you are unable, it is time today come to Christ in honest surrender and salvation...and then leave it at the altar of Christ and let it go. Because "*Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*" I Corinthians 13:4-7

"Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another,
forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you,
so you also must forgive." Colossians 3:13