

## Forgiving Others

ILLUS – In 1968, a man stopped at a telephone box on his way home from work to ring his wife, probably because he was going to be late. He could not have known that, mid-conversation, a drunk driver would fail to give way to another car, spin out of control, mount the footpath, and slam into the telephone box. The telephone went dead in his wife's hand. A couple of hours later she saw the 6 o'clock news report of a fatal accident and that a man had died on the way to the hospital. Another couple of hours later, and the police were on the doorstep. It was the day before Anzac Day 1968, three weeks after my 12<sup>th</sup> birthday, that my mother lost her husband, and my brother and I lost a father. And it wasn't the driver's first fatal accident as a result of drinking. And to make things worse, we found out later that the lawyers handling my mother's case in Brisbane, were involved in the same firm up north representing the driver.

How many of you have ever been hurt or wronged or badly treated or taken advantage of?

I want to talk about an issue that affects us all – forgiving others.

As an adult, I had to forgive that man – I don't condone what he did, but I had to forgive him.

Mat 18:21-22 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."

I think Peter had been thinking about this: Of all the brothers in the world that I could have been landed with, I get stuck with Andrew. He's spilled coffee on my robe twice this week, dropped my fishing rod over the side of the boat, stood on my sore toe. How many times should I have to forgive him?

Then he got an idea – a spiritual one – seven times!

And so, he asked the Lord.

- Peter probably thought that forgiving seven times was a generous offer.
- He was in for a big surprise.
- Jesus' expectation was 70 times greater than Peter's suggestion.
- 70 X 7 was a lot of record-keeping, and it's a lot of forgiving.

Mat 18:23-27 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.

### **God has already set an example for us.**

The king in this parable represents God.

And the servant owed him 10,000 talents.

That's a lot of money – in today's terms, over \$1 billion.<sup>1</sup>

And the king just forgave him.

That speaks of the immense forgiveness God has extended to us.

And even when Jesus walked this earth, He personified God's forgiveness.

For instance, when Jesus was hanging on the cross in agony, He said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” (Luke 23:34)

Then there’s the case of Simon Peter, who had professed his allegiance to Christ, even to death.

But instead he denied Jesus three times.

John 21:15-17 So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Feed My lambs.” (16) He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Tend My sheep.” (17) He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus said to him, “Feed My sheep.”

It’s interesting that Peter denied Jesus three times, and three times Jesus asked him, “Do you love me?” – There’s a link.

And how easy it would have been for Jesus to say, “I’m sorry, mate. After what you’ve done to Me, why would I want anything to do with you?”

I think that if I were Jesus, I would have zapped him!

But instead, Jesus said, “Feed My sheep, tend My sheep, feed My sheep.”

Each time corresponded with Peter’s denial, reinforcing Jesus’ forgiveness.

Peter is restored, and recommissioned by Jesus as an act of forgiveness.

1 Pet 2:21-23 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: (22) “Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth”; (23) who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;

Peter knew firsthand that Jesus is a forgiver.

ILLUS – A minister had sinned very badly and even though he confessed his sin, he never felt forgiven. A lady in his church was always saying, “The Lord said to me ...” It wasn’t that he didn’t believe her, because she was usually right, but she really irked him. One day he said, “If God is speaking to you, ask Him to tell you what it was I did years ago.” She came back. “Did you ask Him?” “Yes.” “And what did He say?” “He said He doesn’t remember.”

Mat 18:28-30 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.

**If we refuse to forgive, we are refusing to forgive a much smaller debt than God has forgiven us for.**

A hundred denarii was about 20 weeks pay for a common labourer.

Let’s be generous and say that the average labourer earns \$1,000 pw.

For twenty weeks work, that’s \$20,000.

That’s a lot of money, but compared to over \$1 billion that was a paltry sum.

We have to understand that whatever anyone does to us, it is insignificant compared to what we have done against God and been forgiven for.

Mat 18:31-35 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.

### **Unforgiveness breaks our fellowship with God.**

When the king found out what had happened, he made it clear that he expected the servant to treat others in the same way he had been treated.

God expects us to forgive others just as we've been forgiven.

### **That means that forgiveness is a choice.**

Why was his master angry? Because it was within his servant's power to forgive, and he chose not to.

God doesn't ask us to do anything that isn't within our power.

ILLUS – Elisabeth Elliot's husband, Jim Elliot was a missionary to a South American tribe of Indians. After only 27 months of marriage he was murdered by the Indians he was trying to help. Years later, she remarried and her second husband died of cancer. At one point while she was a widow she actually went back to share God's love with the same tribe of Indians that had murdered her husband.

Elisabeth Elliot made a choice to forgive.

ILLUS – The son of a Victorian couple was operated on and survived. But then he suddenly died. The doctor admitted to administering the wrong drugs. The parents met with him. The father said to him, "I want to say two things. First, we forgive you. Second, you have a reputation for arrogance and I hope this will cause you to change your attitude."

Those grieving parents made a choice to forgive.

There's a lot of confusion about forgiveness.

People know they should, but they try and try, and eventually give up, because it's too hard – it's impossible.

But often that's because they don't understand how to do it.

People focus on trying to change something that they have no direct control over.

They focus on their emotions, and we can't directly change those.

But what we can do is focus on changing what is under our control.

Three areas are directly involved in forgiving others.

They are, our thoughts, our words, our actions.

All these are under our control.

So here are three steps to forgiving others:

#### **1. First, I must control my thoughts**

I must refuse to think negative thoughts about the person who has hurt me.

If I don't, I am feeding the negative feelings.

Your thoughts feed your emotions.

We can't keep mulling over the past in our heads, and then expect to feel forgiving.

ILLUS – There's this angry dog inside our heads that just keeps on barking. And if we keep feeding it, it will keep on barking. The only to shut it up is to starve it.

#### **2. Next I must control my tongue.**

ILLUS – I once caught a bus downtown and was fascinated by a middle-aged woman who sat by herself and kept talking at the top of her voice. I happened to get off at the same stop, and being young and stupid, I asked

her why she was talking to herself. It turns out that her husband had been cheating on her, and she was so angry, she couldn't hold it in.

But I can't forgive a person if I want to keep talking about the hurt, or criticising.

I undermine my own ability to forgive if I tell everyone who will listen, "Did you hear what so-and-so did to me?"

### **3. And finally, I need to take control of my actions, and resist the temptation to take revenge.**

ILLUS – I read this letter someone had written to a local newspaper. A very big thumbs down to the person or persons who invaded our privacy on September 18, in the early hours of the morning. Thieves are not welcome in our house. Not only did they invade our privacy but they stole a cream nightie from the washing line. I wish only bad karma to you and hope that the bear which is on the front of my nightie, urinates all over you in your sleep. One day someone will steal from you and then you will know just how it feels.<sup>2</sup>

Sad, isn't it?

ILLUS – We were walking on a track and a woman was cycling in the opposite direction. My wife pointed out that she had an empty baby seat on the back of her bike. So, on her next lap, I said jokingly, "I think you must have lost your baby somewhere on the track." She gave a little smile and cycled on. On the next lap she said, "I think you must have left your brain at home". Ouch! I thought, "What a nasty little retort." And that set me thinking of equally nasty retorts or actions. But I kept my thoughts to myself. We walked a few more times round the track, then left. Shortly afterwards, the woman caught up to us, sped past and suddenly fell sideways. When we got to her she had dislocated her elbow, possibly her shoulder, and grazed her right leg and hand. I immediately thought: "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.

If we are consistent in keeping our mind, our speech and our actions free from unforgiveness, eventually our emotions will follow suit.

But forgiveness is not primarily about the way we feel, it's about the choices we make.

Not only is forgiveness a choice, it is a series of choices.

Because the enemy will always oppose your decision to forgive.

He'll keep bringing back negative thoughts into your mind.

Consistency is what counts.

### **Forgiving others does not mean that you have to trust them.**

Forgiving a person who has embezzled money from the company, does not mean putting them in a position of trust with money.

That's just dumb, and it puts that person in a position of temptation in an area of known weakness.

Forgiving your child doesn't mean you don't follow through on discipline.

ILLUS – I can't just say, "Well I forgive them. I'm going to leave it at that." That's not acting in the best interests of the child. If a child needs a smack, we have a responsibility to give it to them.

Apply the board of education to the seat of learning.

### **Unforgiveness leads to bondage; forgiveness leads to liberty.**

ILLUS – A lady was separated from her husband in England and left there to come to Australia. She gave her heart to the Lord here, and some years later her husband and his new wife came for a visit to Australia. She not only brought them to church, but put them up in her house, being more interested in their salvation than revenge.

That's forgiveness in action.

Heb 12:15 looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;

We are not allowed loopholes by which to consider ourselves exceptions by virtue of the horrendous nature of crimes against us. God knows that harboured bitteresses brew deadly poisons within; poisons have the capacity to destroy us and defile those around us.<sup>3</sup>

Forgiveness is not (holy) amnesia which erases the past – instead it is the experience of healing that draws the poison out. You may recall that hurt but you will not relive the hurt. Author David Augsburger

**Unforgiveness hurts the victim, not the offender.**

ILLUS – Picture this: Someone comes knocking on my door in the middle of the night. I'm sound asleep so I don't hear it. But I have a guest, and they hear it and answer the door. "G'day, mate, I'm a robber, and I want to rob your house," says the door-knocker. "Sure", replies the guest. "Come on in." And the guest goes back to bed. In the morning, I wake up and find that all my electrical goods are gone. Worse, I find out that my guest is responsible. I'm really angry. I kick my guest out. The next night, I'm still so angry, that I can't sleep. There's another knock at the door. This time I answer it. "G'day, mate," says the door-knocker again. "I'm a robber, and I want to rob your house," "Sure", I reply. "Come on in." And then I go back to bed. In the morning, I wake up and find out that the thief has taken all my jewellery. Next night, it's my cash, then my bonsai collection, then my antiques ...

Not that I've got most of that stuff, by the way.

But the first time I was robbed, who's to blame? My guest was to blame.

But the next night, who's to blame? Me.

John 10:10 The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

When someone hurts you, it's not your fault you've been robbed of your goods, your reputation, your innocence, your joy, a loved one.

But when you refuse to forgive, you open the door and let the enemy in to keep robbing you.

Whose fault is it then if you're being robbed?

Jesus said the unforgiving servant would be handed over to the tormentors.

Unforgiveness brings bondage, but forgiveness brings liberty.

There's no use my saying, "I'll teach them. I'll never forgive."

Because I'm the main beneficiary when I forgive.

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<sup>1</sup> Carson, D.A. *Expositor's Bible Commentary*: Matthew Ch 13-28 p 406

<sup>2</sup> Thumbs Up, Thumbs Down, *The Reporter* 3-10-01, p 10.

<sup>3</sup> Sandford, Paula *Healing Victims of Sexual Abuse* p68