



"Cast all your cares on God; that anchor holds."
—Alfred, Lord Tennyson

01-May-09

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

The sequence of petitions in the second half of the Lord's Prayer ([Matthew 6:11-12](#)) tells each of us that we should pray daily for the food needed for that day. The next request is for God's forgiveness of our sins, followed by what can be a threatening, disturbing statement: that God's forgiveness of us is directly tied to our forgiveness of those who have sinned against us! We must reciprocate God's forgiveness by forgiving other's [offenses](#) committed against us.

The need for food each day is something [God](#) created. The need for forgiveness each day is something we have created through [sin](#). Sin places us under obligation to seek forgiveness from God because the sins are against Him. However, a person cannot [seek God](#) for forgiveness until he is first aware of his indebtedness. One cannot truly forgive until he is aware of his shortcomings because it is from a sensitive awareness of one's own weaknesses that sympathetic feelings for other's weaknesses are born.

In order to impress this principle on every hearer of His Word, [Jesus](#) returns to the subject of forgiveness in [Matthew 6:14-15](#) after completing His instruction on prayer: "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." When such teaching follows so closely after identical teaching, God is clearly attempting to press its importance home to us.

Jesus' Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector shows the self-righteous to be a

critical and unforgiving people because they cannot see their own weaknesses. They have a difficult time putting themselves into another person's shoes. [Luke 18:9](#), 14 records, "Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others. . . . 'I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other, for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.'"

How can a person forgive when he has an exalted opinion of himself and simultaneously despises others? How can one who in his own eyes never does anything wrong be guilty of committing an offense against another? This person is set up for being easily aggrieved over insignificant offenses that he perceives as having been deliberately committed against him and being unable to forgive because it is beneath him to excuse one he despises. To scorn the offender and to speak evil of him are far more likely reactions.

Notice the scornful comment of the self-righteous Pharisee in [Luke 7:39](#): "Now when the Pharisee who had invited [Jesus] saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, 'This man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner.'" Yet, notice that Jesus does not forgive the disdainful Pharisee, but the woman: "Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little" (verse 47).

The Pharisee loved neither God nor the woman. If he had loved God, he would have served Jesus and been more sympathetic and tolerant toward the woman. This leads us to understand that beginning to love God triggers the seeking of His forgiveness, and from that relationship flows the [merciful](#) attitude and the ability to forgive as one is forgiven by God because it induces consideration of one's own failings.

Self-exalting, self-righteous people have such a high opinion of themselves that they are essentially ignorant of the need to grant forgiveness, especially to those they judge as beneath them. We are often guilty of setting limits on our granting of forgiveness because we believe that it merely opens the door to further abuse by the offender. Jesus addresses this in [Matthew 18:21-22](#) and [Luke 17:3-5](#). His instruction helps us to understand God's expectation of us as His children. His standard for us is exceedingly high.

When Peter asks his question about how often he should forgive his brother, it appears he understood his estimation to be quite high. He asks, "Up to seven times?" ([Luke 17:4](#) adds "in a day"). No, Jesus replies, "but up to seventy times seven"! Jesus' figure of speech implies "without limits" or "without number." This so shocks the disciples that

they reply, "Lord, increase our [faith](#)" ([Luke 17:5](#))!

Offenses against one another within the church are inevitable. To God, pardoning these offenses is so important to the creation of Christ's image in us and to the [peace](#) and spiritual well-being of the church that it must be done regardless of what we fear the outcome will be. Our trust in God that He is overseeing the well-being of all concerned must be strong enough to place the outcome in His hands. God is well aware of all the facets of the offense and all the hurts inflicted. Do we believe that He knows who did what and why, as well as the correct balance of innocence and cause in every case?

What is forgiveness on our part? It is to lay aside all claim of getting even. Paul writes in [Romans 12:14](#), "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse." He adds in verse 17, "Repay no one evil for evil," and in verse 19, "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord."

Rising to defend ourselves is a natural but carnal reaction, yet we must trust God to bring things to light in His own order and timeframe. We must not allow ourselves to resort to counter-offenses, as did brethren in Corinth, who took one another to court before unbelievers. Paul corrects them for not letting go of their vengeful spirit, telling them, "Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated?" ([I Corinthians 6:7](#)).

Sometimes we need to be reminded of how important God considers our responsibility to forgive. Jesus' [Parable of the Unforgiving Servant](#) ([Matthew 18:22-35](#)) covers this. It follows Peter's question in verse 21, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus' conclusion is found in verses 32-35:

Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, "You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. 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.

This is truly a weighty responsibility. Only through much prayer can all of our resentment be dissolved and any breach be healed. God is the God of all peace. He can and will respond to our honest and sincere requests for the reconciliation of a damaged

brotherly relationship.

- John W. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[The Need for Forgiveness](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Richard Ritenbaugh, expounding upon the principle that it is more blessed to give than to receive, suggests that the things we ardently desire for ourselves we should be willing to give to others, including forbearance and forgiveness. Following the Apostle Paul's example to the Corinthians, we ought to forgive and comfort one who has genuinely repented. Godly character includes the capacity to forgive and exercise forbearance. Within the body of Christ, we consist of interdependent cells, dependent upon each other. By failing to forgive our brother, we jeopardize the health or well being of the entire body. Extending forgiveness to a repentant brother is a godly characteristic, strengthening the entire body, leading to unity. Our Elder Brother's example should be our standard.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Parable of the Unforgiving Servant](#)

by Martin G. Collins

Offenses and sins against us are unfortunately common. Jesus teaches us how to deal with them in this parable, focusing on our attitude of forgiveness because of being forgiven ourselves.

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