

Bible Studies

Unforgiveness

Forgiveness of sins is central to the Christian faith. It is only because God forgives our sins that we can be accepted into His presence. But the Bible teaches that this forgiveness is reciprocal. We too must forgive those who sin against us.

Read Matthew 18v21-35

What did Jesus mean by seventy seven, (Or 70x7)

Jesus is not saying you don't have to forgive offence number 78, or 491. If you are keeping count it is proof that you are already in trouble!

Who do the people in the parable represent?

What do the two debts represent?

How did he intend us to feel when we heard this parable?

What did Jesus intend us to understand when we heard this parable?

Clearly this parable is intended to outrage us and to make us aware of the connection between God forgiving and us forgiving. The king in the story did not have to forgive the debt, he went beyond what was asked of him. God did not have to forgive our sin. It was His own choice, He could have left us to perish. We do not deserve His forgiveness.

Jesus wanted us to understand that it is an untenable position to delight in God's forgiveness while withholding our forgiveness for those who sin against us.

What does such a view say of our understanding of God and His forgiveness?

I think it shows a basic misunderstanding. It proves we do not really understand the extent of God's forgiveness or it's cost. Like the Pharisee in Luke 7v40+ we think we have been forgiven little. I think it also shows a contempt for God.

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. Matthew 6:12

What sort of things are meant by debts?

Obviously debt here means sin.

Do you think there is a reason Jesus used this terminology?

The Parable goes on to explain how the Servant was turned over to the jailer to be tortured, until he pays back his debt. We can of course never make restitution sufficient for our sins. Jesus then makes an earth shattering statement.

"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart." Matthew 18:35

What do you think Jesus meant by this?

Before we go any further we must consider another verse.

Read Matthew 6v14-15

What is the major consequence of not forgiving others?

How does this fit in with the parable?

Why does God not forgive us when we won't forgive others?

Jail could mean three things

1

If we do not forgive, invariably we live with bitterness, resentment, vindictiveness and anger in our lives, we miss out on a whole heap of the love joy and peace that Jesus has to offer. To this extent we find ourselves in a prison of our own making.

This is compounded by the fact that if we do not forgive we are not forgiven by God, we are therefore living with the negative consequences of our sins, like guilt.

2

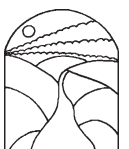
Secondly; Unforgiveness is one of those sins, (like not honouring parents) that seems especially to open us up to enemy attack. Unforgiveness can be the root of demonic oppression.

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Thirdly; if it is taken to its extremes, when we stubbornly refuse to forgive and are consequently not ourselves forgiven, we come under condemnation. It is possible Jesus had Hell in mind. We must be careful to qualify this. Unforgiveness does not automatically lead to condemnation.

What does forgiving *from the heart* mean?

What will the evidence be that forgiveness is genuinely from the heart?

Will your attitude change towards someone when you have forgiven them?

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Eph 4:32

Why should we forgive?

We have seen some reasons already,

If we want God to forgive us then we must forgive too.

If we want to be free of bitterness etc.

Not being '*Overcome by Evil*'. Romans 12v21

It is not a tenable position for a Christian to bear a grudge.

Who is forgiveness for?

The basic point here is this, we do not forgive for the sake of the person who sinned against us. They may not deserve forgiveness. They may not want our forgiveness, but they are irrelevant to the question.

Forgiveness is for us. We need to forgive much more than they need to be forgiven.

Forgiveness is an issue between us and God, not us and the other person. If we want to be free from prison then we must forgive. It is for our mental and spiritual health.

If you forgive someone, are you letting them off the hook? Romans 12:19

Is it unreasonable of God?

And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins." Mark 11:25

Some people feel that it is unreasonable of God to expect us to forgive even those who do not ask for forgiveness and are not repentant. Such a view misses the point because it assumes that forgiveness is for the sake of the other person, not for us. I think this argument is an excuse not to forgive.

Who should take the initiative?

Matthew 5v23-24, Matthew 18:15, Luke 17:4

At first these verses seem contradictory but the answer is simple. Under all circumstances, whether you sin or are sinned against, **it is you.**

Are there times when things are best left?

When something is not an issue, it is best not to make it one.

Is it possible?

And if I am not able to forgive a person for something that was truly terrible and indefinable, does that mean God will not forgive my sin?

I think the answer to both questions is, no. We are talking here about serious things.

Hurts that are so deep as to almost be without cure. To forgive such things is not humanly possible. Many of the things Jesus told us to do are impossible. Eg.

"But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, Luke 6:27

(Can you do this without forgiveness?)

The point is, you are not expected to do this in your own strength. But even with God's help, it is a tall order. Unless God does a dramatic work of grace, I defy anyone to forgive a serious offence from the heart, in one go.

I believe the secret is to forgive to the extent that you can.

It may go through stages like this.

Acknowledging that you are going to have to forgive.

Praying a "Lord I forgive" prayer, as an act of faith and obedience.

Meaning it!

Genuinely forgiving them from your heart.

I believe that all God requires of us is to go as far as we can when we can. He will do the work in us to take us further. It is not uncommon for this to take years. Or to think you have forgiven someone only to find there is still bitterness there. Until we have forgiven from the heart we must keep these things as *live* issues.