The Importance of Forgiveness

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As we prepare for Jesus' second coming, we are faced with making some very important decisions and actions regarding forgiveness: There are two aspects of forgiveness:

1) repenting, asking for forgiveness and making restitution, and
2) forgiving and showing mercy to others.

This message will cover the second of these aspects, and perhaps we can do the other part at a later time.

Shall we bow our heads for prayer one more time?

1. Matthew 5:48
Be ye perfect even as your father which is in heaven is perfect.

What is perfection? A rich young ruler approached Jesus and asked him, What do I need to do to inherit eternal life?

2. Matthew 19:21
Jesus said unto him, if you would be perfect, go and sell all you have and give to the poor and you shall have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.

3. Luke 6:35-36
Love your enemies and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and you shall be the children of the Highest, **for He is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil**. **Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful**.

4. Matthew 5:7
Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy.

Today I want to focus on ***Christ's*** teaching on forgiveness.

Would you repeat with me the Lord's Prayer as found in Matthew?

5. Matthew 6:9-13
Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

6. Matthew 6:14-15
For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your father forgive your trespasses

7. Mark 11:24-25
therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.

8. Matthew 18:21-24
[21] 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.

9. Matthew 18:25-28

[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!'

10. Matthew 18:29-32

[29] So his fellow servant fell down at his feet[a]and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.'[b][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.

11. Matthew 18:33-35

[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.

Reinstatement of the debt

This is what a lot of Christians don't seem to get. I have never heard a sermon on what I'm going to share, but it is very important. It will shift your thinking towards forgiveness.

Note what the King did. He **reinstated** the debt to the debtor he had earlier forgiven! The King was angry and delivered him to **who**? the tormentors until he should pay all that was owed him. And then Jesus emphasizes, "so will my Father do to you if you don't forgive your brother **from your heart**!"

12. 2 Corinthians 5:10-11

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.

Revelation 20 shares more details on the judgment, and how all who have not been saved and participated in the first resurrection will be judged and thrown into the lake of fire, which is the second death. I'm not going to go into detail on the judgment, but you can read it for yourself in Revelation chapter 20.

But let me make the point: **ALL who are not saved will have their sins reinstated to them** and they will have to pay the penalty **in full** for the sins committed while they were alive. I don't know about you friends, but if I have the choice of accepting Jesus' forgiveness of my sins and eternal life, or paying the penalty in full for my own sins, then I'd rather take Jesus' love and the eternal life option! How about you?

So let's look carefully at what Jesus says we need to do to make that happen with regards to forgiveness.

How do you feel when you are forgiven?

We love grace when it applies to us. We love forgiveness when it applies to our sins. We love mercy when it applies to us. But how do we treat others who sin or trespass against us?

What does Romans 5:8 say? "… while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Who reaches out first? God does. Christ does, the Father does!

We know that Christ forgives sins. JESUS is the great Initiator, HE is the great Lover, HE is our great example. Christ forgives us first. **Then** He expects us as his disciples and followers to copy or emulate him. Let me make that stronger), He REQUIRES us to copy or emulate Him? He requires us to pass the love along, pass the forgiveness along, pass the mercy along.

In Jesus' parable, what did the KING do ***first*** to the debtor who owed him 10,000 talents? He forgave him FIRST!

Some will say, I will forgive, but I will never forget? Is this true forgiveness? Is this the type of conditional forgiveness God offers us?

13. Psalms 103:8-12

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide neither will he keep his anger forever. He has not dealt with us after our sins: nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens is high above the earth, so great is his mercy towards them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

14. Psalms 103:17-18

but the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him and on to his righteousness unto his children's children, to such as keep his covenant and to those who remember his commandments to do them.

Jesus said, as you forgive others, so will my father do to you. Do you really want to hold back on your forgiveness?

Before we go further, let me address abuse or being with a toxic person. Forgiveness does not mean allowing yourself to be continually exposed to harm if you can help it. Forgiveness does not mean that you allow yourself to be disrespected or abused. It does not mean that you remain in contact with those who continue to seek your harm or to slander you. It does not mean that you don't take steps to prevent or correct the sin against you.

There are times when change is needed. Jesus gives guidance on this as well.

15. Matthew 18:15-17

If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or tax collector.

And in the time of Jesus, pagan and tax collectors were ostracized, shunned, avoided. Jesus said, do what you can and then move on!

Forgiveness and mercy means releasing your mind from harboring a grudge against these individuals. It means releasing any right that you might have to vengeance or restitution, rather leaving that to God's hand.

What did God say?

16. Hebrews 10:30
For we know him that has said, vengeance belongs to me. I will repay says the LORD. And again, the LORD shall judge his people.

17. Deuteronomy 32:35
To me belongeth vengeance, and recompense. Their foot shall slide in due time

From My Story by Elizabeth Smart

Some of you may remember Elizabeth Smart. At the age of 14, while sleeping in her bed, she was kidnapped from her family's Salt Lake City, Utah home on June 5, 2002. She was found nine months later on March 12, 2003, in Sandy, Utah, 18 miles from her home, in the company of Brian David Mitchell and Wanda Ileen Barzee. On October 1, 2009, Smart testified to being raped three to four times daily, tied up and threatened with death if she attempted escape.[1] On the day of her return, Elizabeth's mother gave her some advice that is so wise for anyone who has been molested or hurt. Elizabeth writes in her book, *My Story*: Right after her release and arrival home:

The only thing I wanted to do was to have another bath. Then, while the other members of my family were waiting in the living room, my mom pulled me aside at the top of the stairs.

"Before it gets too crazy, I need to tell you something," she said.

I turned to look at her. She was so beautiful to me.

"This is important," she started. I could see from the look on her face that it was. I listened as intently as I could. And I'm very glad I did, for what she was about to say turned out to be the best advice that anyone has ever given me. In fact, I would say it changed my life.

"Elizabeth, what this man has done is terrible. There aren't any words that are strong enough to describe how wicked and evil he is! He has taken nine months of your life that you will never get back again. But the best punishment you could ever give him is to be happy. To move forward with your life. To do exactly what you want. Because, yes, this will probably go to trial and some kind of sentencing will be given to him and that wicked woman. But even if that's true, you may never feel like justice has been served or that true restitution has been made.

"But you don't need to worry about that. At the end of the day, God is our ultimate judge. He will make up to you every pain and loss that you have suffered. And if it turns out that these wicked people are not punished here on Earth, it doesn't matter. His punishments are just. You don't ever have to worry. You don t ever have to even think about them again."

She paused, as if the next words were the most important, "You be happy, Elizabeth. Just be happy. If you go and feel sorry for yourself, or if you dwell on what has happened, if you hold on to your pain, that is allowing him to steal more of your life away. So don't you do that! Don't you let him! There is no way that he deserves that. Not one more second of your life. You keep every second for yourself. You keep them and be happy. God will take care of the rest."

It's been ten years since my mother said those words. The years have proven she was right.

My Story, p. 285, 286

Joyce Meyers, who as a child had been sexually abused by her father, wrote a powerful book on forgiveness called "Beauty for Ashes". For years she had harbored anger, bitter and resentment against him. But then God transformed her life and she forgave her father. Yet amazingly, he would not admit to doing anything wrong. But through it all she learned and wrote this truth:

"First, let me say that it is not possible to have good emotional health while harboring bitterness, resentment, and unforgiveness. Harboring unforgiveness is like drinking poison and hoping your enemy will

[1] Barzee, who turned state's evidence was sentenced to 15 years in prison and Mitchell got two life sentences.

die! Unforgiveness poisons anyone who holds it, causing him to become bitter. And it is impossible to be bitter and get better at the same time!"

Let me paraphrase this truth this way:

"Unforgiveness is a poison the victim drinks hoping it will hurt his or her offender."

Unforgiveness creates in us a chronic stressful state. The body releases adrenaline and then cortisol. With the body continually bathed in these fight or flight hormones, they attack the heart and our blood vessels. It causes the bones and skin to deteriorate. It reduces immune system function and we become more prone to disease, especially cancer.

In a Men's Health Magazine an article called "50 ways to beat the reaper" reported that Purdue scientists discovered that constant worrying shortens your life span by an amazing 16 years! Worrying, negativism, pessimism, unforgiveness, bitterness, anger and resentment, all have a similar affect. It ages you and shortens your life ***dramatically***! In fact, it shortens it more than smoking, more than eating an unhealthful diet, more than lack of exercise! In Luke 12:25 in the newer translations, Jesus said, "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?" (NIV). Worrying not only cannot add to your years, but it subtracts heavily from your life!

Unforgiveness makes one long for revenge. Yet even if you are successful in causing pain to the one who hurts you, it is never enough. Unforgiveness saps away the enjoyment of life, and fills one with bitterness, anger and resentment. But the biggest thing is that it separates us from God. It separates us from the source of joy, peace and life; it separates us from health and in the long run: eternal life.

Satan knows this. He does everything he can to cause us pain. Because he knows that every unforgiven pain is a chink in the fortress of our soul that his demonic agencies can use to get into our lives. Every unforgiven pain can lead to bitterness, anger and resentment. The Holy Spirit cannot dwell in someone with those characteristics.

18. 3 John 1:2
Beloved, I wish above all things that you may prosper and be in health even as your soul prospers.

See, there is an order. Your soul prospers first, THEN your health and finances prospers.

19. Ephesians 4:32
Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, <u>forgiving each other, just as God also in Christ forgave you</u>.

Some people say forgiveness is a process. I respectfully disagree. **<u>When God is involved</u>**, true forgiveness is a momentary event; it's an instant in time. It is transformative. It is healing.

20. John 14:27
Peace I leave with you. my peace I give unto you. Not as the world gives, give I to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

21. Matthew 11:28-30
Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Let me share my story: I love my wife dearly, but as we have quite opposite personality traits, we often have our differences. I won't go into details as to causes, but suffice to say there have been many times when I have been deeply hurt by things she has done or said, and I'm sure the opposite is true as well. There is an annual religious convocation in Oregon where I used to live called campmeeting. Thousands of people attend, listening to speakers delivering inspiring messages and the music can be uplifting. It goes for 4 days, and many people camp in tents or RVs there. At one of those campmeetings, the hurt that I felt was so deep that I felt deeply separated from my wife, and unfortunately also from God. Remember what I said about unforgiveness separating us from the Father? Here I was sitting in the middle of a large religious convocation and I didn't feel anything spiritually. I was shocked to find myself thinking that I didn't care whether I would be saved or not. Can you imagine that, how horrific that was?

I remember walking from the meeting, wondering why I didn't care. Suddenly, I felt the Holy Spirit give me a distinct impression, "I can't hear your prayers when you harbor unforgiveness in your heart." "I can't reach you when you harbor bitterness, anger and resentment".

> **22. 1 Peter 3:7**
> Likewise husbands, live with your wives according to knowledge giving honor to the wife as unto the weaker vessel and as being heirs together of the grace of life that your prayers be not hindered.

I immediately prayed in my heart, asking God to forgive me for my unforgiveness and I forgave my wife as well. The results were immediate! Transformational! The communication lines were open again! God put a love in my heart and we were reconciled, my wife and I -- and God and I.

Is there someone you need to forgive? Is there someone close to you that you are holding something against? Is there someone you need to be reconciled to? Do not wait for them to come to you. **Never relegate your happiness to someone who you feel has harmed you.**

Some of you need to make a list, a list of people who have hurt you. **Who are those most likely to have hurt you?** Were these people who were closest to you? your husband, wife or an ex-husband or ex-wife, parents, children, boss, fellow employees, classmates, teachers, church members, your pastor?

My list was 3 pages long of text in standard 12-point font. If you are not sure who to add to your list, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you who you need to forgive. Write it down.

Then kneel down in humility and respect before the Father, and present that list to the LORD. What did Jesus say? Forgive them from <u>your heart</u>. Tell the LORD you forgive them. Don't dwell on the pain. If you have a splinter, you are not going to pull it out slowly, lingering over every millimeter of the splinter. No, yank it out. Tag and go. Move on from person to person recognizing what God has done for you, what Jesus has done for you, and doing the same thing for them.

After you get up from your knees, you should feel a large burden has fallen off of you. If not, then over the next few days as it settles in, you will feel a bounce in your step, a lightness in your heart that says, a miracle happened, the miracle of forgiveness.

Then to the greatest extent possible, tell those on your list that you forgive them.

Some of you have heard of the book, ***Unbroken***. It's come out as a movie as well. The main character is a lieutenant, Louis Zamperini, whose bomber went down in the Pacific Ocean during World War II. He and several of his crew survived 47 days at sea. They finally came near an island only to be captured by a Japanese patrol. He was treated terribly, including being tortured by a Japanese officer name Mutsuhiro Watanabe, who they called "the Bird"

After the war, the Zamperini came back to the States, but he was still filled with anger, bitterness and resentment. He married, but for his wife, there is not much enjoyment being married to someone harboring these feelings. His wife suggested that he go to a Billy Graham crusade meeting. There he gave his heart to the LORD and was transformed. He forgave all those who had harmed and tortured him. He even flew to Japan to meet with and convey forgiveness to his captors and tormentors, but the Bird refused to meet with him. Due to the peace he now had, Zamperini lived well into his 90's, dying at the age of 97. The Japanese took away a few years of his life, but God gave him many more.

When you truly forgive, you give up your right to harm the one who hurt you. You give up your right to seek restitution, and in return, you let the LORD reward you with joy, peace and life eternal. If you are married, you give up the right to bring that sin or error up to your spouse in the middle of a fight. If you bring it up again to hurt your spouse, you have not truly forgiven and you are treading on very dangerous ground. How so? Jesus said, "As you forgive others, so my father will do unto you." Ask forgiveness from your spouse for bringing it back up and God also. And never do it again!

To the greatest extent possible, be reconciled. Who knows but they may be transformed by the Christian love you show them. What did Jesus say? "Love one another! By this shall all men know that you are my disciples." (John 13:35)

If you are not sure how the other person might take your forgiveness, try anyways and see what the LORD may do for you and them. If you not sure, present your confusion, your questions to God and let Him guide you.

Let's recap some points from today:

1. Those who cannot emulate our merciful God and forgive their fellow man or woman, will have their debts, their sins reinstated to them. They will pay the penalty in full in the lake of fire. Thus forgiveness of others is essential for our salvation.
2. Unforgiveness is a sin that separates us from God and can hinder our prayers. Satan tries to cause us pain so if we harbor bitterness, anger and resentment, his demons can use those as stepping stones into our lives. Get rid of the unforgiveness and reduce Satan's hold on you!
3. Forgiveness is essential for good health and a long life. Unforgiveness reduces immune system function and leads to chronic sickness and premature aging.
4. Forgiveness is essential for emotional, physical and spiritual healing, joy and peace.

If Jesus commands us to forgive others, then He enables us to do that. The most translated woman writer of all time, Ellen White wrote of God, "All His biddings are enablings."[2]

23. Matthew 11:28-30

Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

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[2] During her lifetime Ellen White wrote more than 5,000 periodical articles and 40 books; but today, including compilations from her 50,000 pages of manuscript, more than 100 titles are available in English. She is the most translated woman writer in the entire history of literature, and the most translated American author of either gender. http://www.whiteestate.org/about/egwbio.asp

"As the will of man co-operates with the will of God, it becomes omnipotent. Whatever is to be done at His command may be accomplished in His strength. All His biddings are enablings." {White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 333}

"The physical, mental, and moral powers are the endowments of God, and are to be appreciated and cultivated. We are here on probation, in training for the higher life. All heaven is waiting to co-operate with those who will be subordinate to the ways and will of God. God gives grace, and he expects all to use it. He supplies the power if the human mind feels any need or any disposition to receive. He never asks us to do anything without supplying the grace and power to do that very thing. All his biddings are enablings. {White, *The Review and Herald*, November 9, 1897 par. 5}

24. Matthew 16:24
If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

25. Luke 23:34
Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.

26. Matthew 7:21-23
Not everyone who says to me Lord Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!

Away from me, you unforgiving people! Away from me those of you who harbor bitterness, anger and resentment! But welcome to those who are merciful, who are loving, kind and gracious.

Do you want God to know you? Do you want to have a relationship with God? Do you want God to say to you, "Well done thou good and faithful servant? Enter into the joy of the LORD?"

Then be merciful and forgiving, even as your Father in heaven is merciful and forgiving.

For a congregation:
Have an altar call, a call to forgive others, so that the Father may forgive you. So that nothing may stand between you and Jesus, your Lord and Savior.

For a group Bible study:
I'd likes to separate into small groups of two or three people. Take a few moments to get each other's names and then have prayer together. Bear one another's' burdens. Praise the LORD for Who He is and what He has done for you. Ask God to help you forgive others who have caused you harm, and ask him also for the strength to ask forgiveness of those you have harmed and need to make restitution to.

Addendum
For those who would like a copy of this message or would like a copy of my message, "How to Truly Repent and Prepare for the Seal of God" go to my public FaceBook page: BiblePlus.org. You can also read some other articles there that may be helpful for you. LIKE the BiblePlus page to be notified when other papers and sermons are posted.

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