

Review

Last Sunday, we examined Jesus' instructions on how to deal with a Christian that sinned against us:

- We are to show him his fault privately. If he listens, then he repents, you forgive, and it's over with, forever.
- If he doesn't listen, one or two come for the second confrontation as witnesses. If he listens, then he repents, you forgive, and it's over with, forever.
- If he doesn't listen, then it goes to the church. If he listens, then he repents, we forgive, and it's over with, forever.
- If after this third confrontation, he doesn't listen, he is removed from fellowship until he does repent.

Now, this leads to questions like, "Well, isn't this whole repentance thing just a little too easy? It seems like such a big a loophole to allow him to say, 'I'm sorry, I repent.' What if he doesn't change? What if he does it again? Is there a limit to what I have to put up with?"

This is exactly what Simon Peter was thinking as he heard this...

18:21 How Often Shall I Forgive?

"How many times do I need to put up with other people's sin?" Peter asked Jesus. "He sins against me, and I need to confront him with the expectation that he will repent. If he repents, I need to forgive him. I understand that. But realistically, how many times do I need to be put through that before writing him off?"

Up To Seven Times?

Have you ever heard the old expression, "Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me"? In my flesh, I'm like that. I think, "You sinned against me, you betrayed me. I'll never trust you again. Even if I forgive you, I'll keep you at arm's length and never let you get close enough to hurt me again."

Others are far more gracious. They figure it's like baseball: three strikes until you're out. "Third time's a charm," they say. It's only at the third sin/repent cycle that they wash their hands of you.

But Peter is going far beyond one or three. I actually don't think Peter is saying, "Lord, seven is my limit. I can handle seven." I think he's exaggerating, using a ridiculously high number. After all, which of us would expect that anyone would actually allow us to go through the sin/repent cycle seven times?

I think that Peter was expecting Jesus to say, "No, Peter. Of course not. You only have to put up with this twice, and then write him off."

But Jesus doesn't say that...

18:22 Seventy Times Seven

So much for Peter's big number! Seven seemed high, but Jesus raises the bar out of sight: Seventy times seven - that's 490!

My natural response? "Yeah, right. Go right ahead and say 490. Me, I'm gonna stick to my original plan. People get one chance with me, one free ride. Then I'm not gonna forgive 'em. They're on their own."

Jesus knows our hearts, and expects our response. And so...

18:23 For This Reason

"For this reason" tells us that Jesus is illustrating what he has just taught. And His illustration is something to which we need to pay close attention, for our very futures depend upon it.

In Jesus' story, a king is settling accounts, calling in the debts which people owe him...

18:24-27 The Forgiveness Of God

A man owed the king ten thousand talents. This is a ridiculously high amount of money, amounting to tens of millions of dollars today.

He had no way on earth to repay it, but begged for patience as he tried. The king had compassion on the man and forgave the debt.

This illustrates the fact that our sin against God is astronomical and not repayable. Even if we tried, through good works or religion, it is an impossible task. But God shows us grace and forgives us in His great compassion.

How does this illustrate our need to forgive our brother? Read the

next part of Jesus' story...

18:28-30 The Forgiven Fails To Forgive

The man who had been forgiven tens of millions of dollars is owed about twenty thousand by someone else. You would think that after having had his debt erased by the compassion of the king, the man would do the same. But he didn't. Instead, he seized the man, started to choke him, and refused to listen to his appeal for patience. He had him thrown in prison.

This is a perfect illustration of us, who have been forgiven by God, refusing to forgive our brother. Yes, their debt is large. But the debt God forgave is infinitely larger.

They tell us, "Have patience with me. I'm still growing. I'm working on it." What is our reaction? Unforgiveness? What if God had the same reaction to us when we came to Him pleading for patience as we grow? He just might. Listen to the final part of the story...

18:31-35 The Debt Reinstated

The king had forgiven the man his debt. But when he saw that the man failed to forgive the debt of someone else, THE DEBT WAS REIN-
STATED. The unforgiving man was thrown in prison, being handed over to the torturers. The TORTURERS.

And please don't miss Jesus' words here:

Matt. 18:35 "My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."

Throughout the Scriptures, we are gravely warned: You'd better forgive others if you expect to be forgiven by God. The forgiveness we receive is conditional upon the forgiveness we give.

In the Lord's prayer, Jesus instructed us to pray,

Matt. 6:12 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.'

And He told us why we are to pray this:

Matt. 6:14-15 "For if you forgive others for their transgres-

sions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."

The forgiveness we receive from God can be forfeited if we do not forgive others.

In the gospel of Mark, Jesus said,

Mark 11:25-26 "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions. "But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions."

I understand this is difficult to hear. It is frightening. It is disturbing. It is nerve-wracking. But ultimately, it is what the Bible clearly teaches.

Are you troubled by this? Honestly, if you don't want to walk in fear of having your forgiveness revoked, then heed the warning: Forgive your brother when he repents: EVERY TIME he repents.

In the gospel of Luke, Jesus instructed us,

Luke 17:3-5 "Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him." The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"

What can our response be other than, "I have to be THAT forgiving? Lord, increase my faith!"

Truly, Lord. Increase our faith to forgive.