

BIBLICAL FORGIVENESS

“Forgiving in the Person of Christ”

by Michael Barrett

Giving Forgiveness; Receiving Forgiveness; Appropriating Forgiveness

One of the greatest truths conveyed in the Scriptures is forgiveness. Not only do we consistently find the theme of forgiveness spoken about in the Scriptures, we find true and Biblical forgiveness modeled in the lives of those whose calling was to represent the Father to their generation. Of course, the most notable of these examples was none other than our Lord Jesus Christ.

The intention of the Lord for every believer and follower of Christ is for that person to mature. The most visible fruit of true maturity is obedience to the written Word and to the ways of God. We far too often, however, see that body of Christ being influenced by what James calls “wisdom” that is “earthly, sensual, devilish” (cf James 3:15-17). Additionally, when we see the combination of these influences and the effects of the culture associated with orphan thinking, that coalescence provides the perfect petri dish for the development of what James references as things “earthly, sensual, devilish.” What will undoubtedly result from this will be habits and patterns which represent a clear departure from the high calling of God – the calling of sonship representation.

In this teaching I would like for us to consider again, perhaps by way of reminder, and perhaps at an altogether deeper level, the matter of forgiveness. It is true that we are all called to follow in our Lord’s steps and live in obedience to the Scriptures. I believe that we are on the leading edge of a season of transcendency. I do not want to miss a single thing that the Father, by His grace is offering in this season. I trust that you feel exactly as I do about this. So, let us examine ourselves to be sure that we lay aside every “weight or sin” that would in any way prohibit us from fully entering into the best of what the Lord is offering us in these days! And we do so, in part, by looking into the matter of forgiveness. So, let’s begin.

Forgiving in the person of Christ -

2 Corinthians 2:10-11 “To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ; Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.” I also want you to see these verses in the Zondervan Classic Amplified Version: “If you forgive anyone anything, I too forgive that one; and what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sakes in the presence [and with the approval] of Christ (the Messiah), To keep Satan from getting the advantage over us; for we are not ignorant of his wiles and intentions.”

You will note that in the Amplified Bible translation, the rendering is – “in the presence [and with the approval] of Christ.” The word translated forgive here is: g5483. χαρίζομαι charizomai; middle voice from 5485; to grant as a favor, i.e. gratuitously, in kindness, pardon or rescue: — deliver, (frankly) forgive, (freely) give, grant. Also, please pay particular attention to the framing of this definition: “as a favor”; “gratuitously”; “in kindness”; “pardon” and “rescue”. Every parcel and part of this word defines the nature and character of our Father and of His Son!!

Two Notable Examples

Here are two examples of forgiving “in the person of Christ” / “in the presence of Christ.”

- Jesus – in the presence of the Father: Luke 23:34 from the cross, Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” This word “forgive” is: g0863. ἀφίημι aphīēmi; from 575 and ἵημι hiēmi (to send; an intensive form of εἶμι eimi, to go); to send forth, in various applications (as follow): — cry, forgive, forsake, lay aside, leave, let (alone, be, go, have), omit, put (send) away, remit, suffer, yield up. “to send off; to send away.” If you send a thing off, or send a thing away, that thing is no longer with you.
- Stephen – in the presence of Jesus: Acts 7:59-60 “And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.” Stephen was “in the presence of Christ” as we see in Acts 7:55-56, “But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.”

Forgiving from the heart –

Matthew 18:21-35 “Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called

him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.”

Clearly, we see two very different approaches to forgiveness in the above passage of Scripture. The first method is an example of the rich king whose servant owed him an incredibly vast sum. The rich king entirely forgave his servant of the debt. The second example is that same servant whose fellowservant owed him a meager sum, but the servant who had just been forgiven a massive sum that he would have never been able to pay, refused to forgive his fellowservant the meager debt owed.

We see in these two examples the contrast between mercy and generosity that resulted in the king forgiving from his heart and fear and greed that motivated the forgiven servant to cling to what he believed he deserved and demand that the debt of his fellowservant be paid in full. These two examples teach us some things, albeit in crude terms, about divine forgiveness and human forgiveness. We see men motivated by the unlimited resource of the divine and men motivated by the fear and scarcity associated with the human.

Men are often motivated by that which best serves them (or so they believe) or out of a place of brokenness. God / Christ is always only motivated by that which redeems, rescues, elevates, edifies, lifts the one who is forgiven to a new and more wondrous state!! I suspect that you have experienced the effects of both the influence of the divine and also experienced the influence of the human. If you get to choose, which one would you pick? And now, given that you actually do get to choose when administering forgiveness to others, and in light of how you would want to be treated, how would you choose for others? Which “kind” of treatment do you suppose truly represents the Father and produces an accurate view of God? Which kind of treatment actually “shows” people the Father?

Forgiveness, like any and all of the manifestations of the attributes of God, cannot be measured by human standards. And, I don’t believe it is a stretch for me to say that, given the choice, all of us certainly would desire to experience the manifestation of the divine as compared to anything other. Jesus established for us the standard of measure for love, when He said in John 13:34, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.”

A New Commandment

When Jesus proclaimed a “new commandment” He was emphatically saying that the “old commandment” was officially invalid! Jesus judicially ratified a new standard of measure for the administration of love in the “new

commandment.” And the comparison between the old commandment and the new is apparent. The old commandment states: in Matthew 5:43 – “love your neighbor and hate your enemies”; in Mark 12:31 – “love your neighbor as yourself.” The new commandment states: in John 13:34 – “love one another as I have loved you”; in Matthew 5:44 – “love your enemies.”

How does this actually work? When Jesus raised the bar from “love your neighbor” or even “love your neighbor as yourself” to “love one another as I have loved you” it was a quantum shift. You can do the old and live, but you cannot do the new and live! You must die in order to fulfill the new commandment!! After all, isn’t that what Jesus did and how He truly showed His unconditional love for us? He died for us, and gave us a new commandment, thereby expecting us to die to self and represent Him as we love like He loved!

The Function of the Mediator and By Extension His Representative

When Jesus, from the cross, said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,” He was functioning as one appropriating forgiveness on behalf of the ones who were committing atrocious acts against him. And those same persons were those who: a) needed forgiveness, and b) were not actively seeking forgiveness for themselves. “They know not” is the operative context in this case. But He knew!! He knew what they were doing, He knew that they needed forgiveness based on what they were doing, and He acted propitiously for their benefit in spite of it all!! He assumed the role of a mediator and stood to appropriate forgiveness for those who did not deserve to be forgiven. I feel here that I must say that I am concerned that far too often we operate from a place of quid pro quo, whether in the matter of forgiveness, or love, or kindness, or patience, or generosity – I think you clearly get the picture! Though it may go unsaid, the rule of the day is far too often, I will forgive you when you do all of the right things – and I get the total say on what the “right things” are. But Biblical forgiveness cannot and must not demand prerequisites. I’ll forgive you when, I’ll forgive you if, and perhaps the worst of them all, I’ll forgive you but!! Jesus said, “they don’t know what they are doing.” Does that mean that they didn’t know that they were inflicting pain on Him? Does it mean that they didn’t know that they were about to kill Him? No! It means, that they were blinded by their own fears, their own ambitions, their own belief systems, to the point that they could not see who Jesus really was. So they in fact, did not know what they were doing. But Jesus pushed past that and stood in the place to appropriate what they needed while they were actively taking His life!!

Stephen, right in the midst of being stoned to death, an act of heinous hatred and unrighteousness, called out to God the Father and God the Son. In this act, Stephen, just like Jesus, became the intercessor and the one standing in the gap on behalf of those who were brutally killing him! Stephen, following the example of his Lord Jesus, also acted propitiously on behalf of his executioners. In so doing, Stephen appropriated forgiveness for his murderers!

Jesus knew that He had a mandate to set this piece in place when He said to His disciples, “Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained” (John 20:23). In this verse, the word “remit” is the exact same word translated in 2 Corinthians 2:10 as “forgive.” Jesus was saying to His disciples that they were being commissioned as those who had authority to stand between God and men as representatives of the One who is the Mediator.

Jesus ever lives to make intercession for you. You have been forgiven, once for all, which includes your past, present and future need for forgiveness. So, when you don't even know that you need forgiveness, you have an Advocate with the Father, you have an Intercessor that is praying the will of heaven for you, and you have a Helper (the Holy Spirit inside you) who knows what you don't know! In addition to all of this, you have an onboard, never failing, precision guidance system known as your conscience that will press against you and “mess with you” to get your attention and speak to you in order to convince you that you need to turn into God.

Having said all of this about Jesus, Stephen, and the ministry of reconciliation that is active and ongoing on your behalf, I want to warn you. (Paul said to the Colossian believers, in Colossians 1:28, “Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” So here, I am both teaching and warning – warning and teaching. Beloved, do not become one, like the servant in Matthew 18, who was forgiven the debt of 10,000 talents (multiple millions of dollar minimum - perhaps billions of dollars in today's valuation) that, in turn refused to forgive his fellowservant 100 pence (by some accounts, 15 or so dollars in today's valuation). And what's more, this parable isn't about money or wages! It is about the lovingkindness and tender-mercies of God who is our Father!! You were completely without hope in the world until Jesus rescued you! The song lyric says, “I owed a debt I could not pay, You paid a debt You did not owe.” It was impossible for me or for you to ever “repay” what we owed. So, Jesus paid it all!! Jesus paid your debt in full. And now, having your debt paid in full, you must never become like that wicked servant who insisted that his servant pay in full or be imprisoned for his debt. You who were forgiven all, are required now to turn and forgive all to those who “owe you a debt.”

The truth is this, if you will not forgive from the heart, that is, truly forgive and hold nothing in reserve, it is not the perceived debtor that pays the price, it is you, who refuses to forgive. It has been said, “refusing to forgive is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die.” What sets up in the soul of the person who refuses to forgive is like spiritual cancer. The work of the disease may be undetectable to the one who actually has the disease, but it is slowly spreading and taking the life and vitality to the unforgiver!! And more, the one who refuses to forgive “goes to prison” and is turned over to “the tormentor.” The person who refuses to forgive is subject to torment and torture. This is the warning. The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but it is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17). Tell me about your joy, beloved. Talk to me

about your peace. If these critical endowments from God are apparently missing from your life and your current experience, you need to examine yourself concerning true and Biblical forgiveness.

We are discovering now, as we are walking with those and laboring to see the sons of God come to maturity, that many have spiritual blockages in their souls that result from personal historical experiences. Oftentimes people with these blockages are blind to them. The blockage can be buried so deeply under the activities of life that the person suffering with such a condition does not realize that they have the condition. I am not saying that such a person is “asymptomatic.” Not at all! The symptoms are visible and clear – just not to the person with the symptoms!

Standing in the Gap

God says to Ezekiel (cf 22:30), “And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none.” Now we know ultimately that “the man” that God sought for was the Lord Jesus Christ. With that said, however, both in the old covenant as well as in the new, there has always been found functionaries who, motivated by the will of the Father, *stand in the gap* and *make up the hedge*. The assignment of these is to shield the one who has *the gap* and *the hedge* from the work of their enemy. As agents of mercy, these representatives, as they stand in the gap and make up the hedge, appropriate for the one subject to the ravaging effects of “the gap” and “the hedge”, a place of protection from the enemy.

Now, before you react by saying, “that sounds like an old covenant function”, I should remind you of some Scripture in the New Testament. In Colossians 1:24, Paul says these words, “Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church:.” This verse in the Zondervan Classic Amplified Version is rendered, “[Even] now I rejoice in the midst of my sufferings on your behalf. And in my own person I am making up whatever is still lacking and remains to be completed [on our part] of Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of His body, which is the church.” And, finally, Kenneth S. Wuest, in Wuest Word Studies, translates this verse this way, “I now am rejoicing in my sufferings on your behalf, and on my part am filling up the things lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for the sake of His Body, which is the Church.”

Biblical Forgiveness: Expected and Commanded

Jesus said, “go, and do likewise” when teaching His disciples about mercy. We could also say that the expectation placed on every true believer and follower of Christ is to look at His life as our standard and go and do likewise. Forgiveness is an act of obedience. It is through faith and obedience that we inherit the promises of God. A disciple of Jesus is expected to obey. We so often hear Matthew 28:18-20 quoted with the firm emphasis placed

on going into all the world and sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. But I can tell you honestly that I almost never hear those quoting the verses give an accurate accounting of “the great commission.” The great commission is not just to go. It is not even just to go and share the gospel! It is to go and “teach” and that word is: g3100. μαθητεύω mathēteuō; from g3101 and means: intransitively, to become a pupil; transitively, to disciple, i.e. enroll as scholar: — be disciple, instruct, teach. Our commission is to go into all of the world and disciple those who God gives us influence with who have truly been born again – and teach them to obey!!! Anyone claiming to be a disciple of Jesus Christ must exhibit in their daily life a consistent habit of obedience to God’s Word and His ways!

Forgiveness is expected of you if you are truly the Lord’s. Your life is not your own. You no longer have a right to choose a response to persons or circumstances apart from obedience to the written Word and the Word of the Spirit! “Go and do likewise” is actually the real answer to “WWJD” (What Would Jesus Do)! We know what Jesus would do because we know what Jesus did. He, from the heart, when we were not seeking or asking, forgave! “Father forgive them” is what He said, how He lived and the example He left for us. Biblical forgiveness is expected of you. As Christ’s you are commanded to forgive – from the heart. And when you do, you go free, and when you don’t, you go to prison. Not a prison of iron bars, but a prison of compromise, of selfishness, of fear, of torment. It was for freedom that Christ died, to set us free!

Finally, let me remind you, that Biblical forgiveness makes absolutely no claim on the one being forgiven. The moment you say, think or feel that you have a right or claim against the one that you are expected to forgive, you have forfeited your right to set free and to go free. As a follow up to this teaching, I will lay out a body of revelation dealing with the function of operating in a ministry of reconciliation specific to appropriating forgiveness on behalf of a person who isn’t asking for forgiveness. That topic requires more in-depth treatment than I chose to give to it in this teaching. For now, I strongly urge you to grow in the grace and habit of Biblical forgiveness!