

Forgiveness

Good morning everyone, well I hope you have recovered from last week? Thanks again for all that was done. And a special thank you to all the ladies on Mother's day.

Thank you for all you do in the church, in the home, in fact wherever it is and often the case is, the mother, the woman, is the 'glue that holds everything together'

Something I said last week came back to me in the last few days. I was talking about the importance of **forgiveness** in marriage; you may remember I said this;

'Because every marriage is a union between sinners, forgiveness will be our constant guest and companion within our home. Many things will come and go but the need for forgiveness will remain'

I think that is true in marriage as it is in every area for the Christian.

I would go as far to say; Forgiveness is the cornerstone of Christianity - its fundamental to the Christian faith - it is essential - here's the real cut though, **it is essential to our eternal life.**

If you think about it; Heaven is completely made up, of, **forgiven people** (us) there is no room for anyone who can't forgive.

There are a few scriptures that are 'deadly serious' - you try to avoid dwelling on them too long! Like Matthew 7:22-23;

"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 depart from Me, You workers of lawlessness!'"

And this scripture from Matthew 6:14-15 on forgiveness is in the same category;" *For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins".*

In complete contrast, you look at our world, our society today; the act of forgiveness is not something that is popular or encouraged! Rather, if you are wronged in anyway, the prime motivation is to get justice, vengeance even.

We live in an age where multitudes of lawyers are employed so people might vent their anger, seek recompense, and make people pay for their wrongs.

Listen I'm all for justice! But it seems there is a whole industry built around a **'victim mentality'** - I've been hurt, shunned, my rights violated. Personal responsibility today seems to have 'gone out the window'; people feel the state owe them a life, any 'knocks in life' are seen as unfair and the record needs to be set straight.

What happened to the old adage, when life deals you a 'hard ball' of picking yourself up, dusting yourself down, accepting & forgiving others and taking responsibility for yourself?

This mentality has influenced the church as well. I remember years ago, there was a ministry that encouraged you to 'vent your anger' if I remember, you were given a cushion and asked to punch it! In fact 'bash the living daylights out of it'!

They said; 'let your anger have full expression' - imagine that cushion or pillar as the person or thing that has hurt or frustrates you - better out than in' they would say and 'you will feel better for it'!

How did that teaching ever get past the scriptures that say, 'bless don't curse, forgive your enemies' etc,

In complete contrast I was blessed a few years back to see a 'restorative justice programme' in operation at Oakwood Prison - this programme brings together people harmed by crime or conflict with those responsible for the harm, to find a positive way forward.

Restorative justice holds offenders to account for what they have done. It helps them understand the real impact, take responsibility, and make amends through forgiveness and reconciliation.

I do believe though most of our problems regarding difficulties in forgiveness come because **we ourselves don't really understand how much we have been forgiven** - we don't realise the debt we have been released from - a debt we simply could not pay.

I was heard the story the other day about a young family flying off on holiday together, they were waiting at the airport and the little girl in the family wanted to watch her favourite movie on her dad's phone.

The problem was that the movie could only be watched through 'data roaming'. He explained that it was a very expensive way to watch the movie because they were in another country.

However this young girl nagged him so much that in the end the father said that if she really wanted to - 'she could watch her movie, **if she paid the bill herself from her own pocket money allowance**'.

She agreed, but neither of them realised quite how expensive it would be. When the father got his phone bill it cost over £200 for the time that she sat there watching the movie!

The little girl owed her father a lot of money and it would take her ages to pay him back from her pocket money.

She cried and asked him to have mercy on her. After thinking about it the father felt sorry for her. He sat her down and told her that he would cancel her debt. She was overjoyed! In some small way that's what it means to have a debt cancelled. It was way above her means to pay.

The truth is that all of us have had debt cancelled by God? Of course Jesus tells a much more compelling story on this '**The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant**' Matthew 18:21-35

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

²³ "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him.

²⁵ Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

"At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.'²⁷ The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.

²⁸ "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins.^[c] He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

²⁹ "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.'

"But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. ³¹ When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

³² "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³ Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?'

³⁴ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

Isn't the root of this story? - **That his own master's forgiveness never really impacted the unmerciful servant** – he was never really moved, he was left untouched by that experience?

I fear this is our main problem regarding forgiveness, in fact not just in the area of forgiveness but generally in finding reality in our own Christian walk.

We don't really know or understand - **here in the heart that is**, what God has really done for us - or what the cross means. It may have impacted us on an intellectual level - we know Jesus has died for us but how much do we know that emotionally, in the heart, and feel it every day?

The truth is; for all of us we need to have a much deeper revelation of our own 'lost state' and then a revelation of what Jesus has done for us, what He has rescued us from, if we are going to walk with absolute conviction.

We can believe 'Jesus is Lord', that there is 'no other way to God', we can know Him as friend and comforter but unless we know the reality of His forgiveness and our absolute need for it - we grope around like the half healed blind man that says he sees 'men as trees walking'.

Firstly do we know what our destiny was before God intervened in our life? The scriptures tell us we were deserving hell! – Eternal damnation - I know we don't like to talk about it.

We must understand that hell is a very real place. Many believers don't accept that hell exists or that they can end up there.

For anyone who doubts the existence of hell, God gives us the evidence. Jesus says, "I tell you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more.

But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear Him" (Like 12:4-5).

Not believing hell is real - means people try to distort the scriptures. Erase sections of them, but what their doing is trying to gag Jesus! David Pawson said 'he learnt all he knew about hell from the lips of Jesus'.

You may remember the film 'Shinglers List' ... the story was about one man, a German a factory owner who insisted he needed Jewish workers for his armament factory - he bought them from the Nazi's with all he had.

And by doing so he saved many of them from certain death and the gas chambers. **He rescued them.** God has done the same for us, but we say 'a God of love would never send anyone to hell' but how many of us really grasp the holiness of God? – A God who cannot look on sin.

The unmerciful servant knew only in a superficial way the debt he had been forgiven, he would have been sold as a slave - thrown into prison, tortured even, until he paid his debt (his final fate) but he didn't really believe that in reality.

Is it not a fact? That if we really believed the potential and appalling destiny of our relatives, our unsaved friends that we would be far more zealous for their salvation?

We need to cry out to God - to let us see the reality of a person's destiny.

It is what motivated the preachers of old - they saw each soul converted as 'a brand saved from the fire'

Secondly do we really know how much we have transgressed? Or how much we have fallen short of Gods righteousness & commandments?

I think if asked, most of us would say, about ourselves, as we recollect the days before we were saved; 'that we were a reasonable sort of person to the world's standards'! We didn't do anything really bad. Can I encourage you to read this tract - it talks about been a 'good person'

But here's the reality check! Can any of us reach this standard?

"To love the Lord your God with all your mind, heart and soul and your neighbour as yourself" The first 2 commandments - we have all failed miserably.

Can I ask you honestly - have you a real sense of your own sin that drove Jesus to the cross? If not cry out for it! And if you're blessed to get it, you will find a new motivation and heart for the lost and in your own Christian life.

There is not a lot you and I can do about these 2 things - to find that living reality that is, in what we have been saved from - except to pray, it has to be a work of the Holy Spirit, nobody else can do it.

So what is forgiveness? I think it is best described in this way "An intentional decision **to let go** of anger and resentment" it's not an emotion! It is 'an intentional decision' to forgive - a choice in response to a command.

A choice to forgive, but also a choice **to remember no more** the problem with un-forgiveness is it assigns you to live in the past - a past memory that eats away at you.

Let's read this scripture from **Heb 10:17**

"This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds." Then he adds: "**Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.**"

This is really important, when we forgive; **we choose not to remember the wrongdoing against us.** That is quite different to trying to erase it from our minds - to trying to forget it completely. No! God says **remember it no more**, it means when recollections come up again of the wrong - we reject them and move our mind onto something else.

Another thing about forgiveness is we are told to 'bless not curse' and by praying for someone I have found it releases something in the heavenly realms.

I have had some problems with my brother over the years, some wrongs done, we hardly spoke, never communicated, but a couple of years ago, I believe the Lord said to me 'don't hold grudges' – Forgive and bless him. That's what I did. I prayed for him. Now our relationship is good...

A couple of things on - what forgiveness isn't!

Firstly it's not having to feel good about horrible thing - when someone has said or done something that has really hurt you – and you have forgiven them, don't feel guilty about been hurt and really feeling it, God may heal that hurt in time but because forgiveness is a choice it doesn't mean you are going to feel all 'lovey dovey' about it.

Also forgiveness isn't about getting the other person to change that's not the point of forgiveness **Leave that to God** Rom 12.19 'Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," – God is the final judge and everyone will stand before Him one day.

Here's the key though;

Forgiveness does not mean the sin against you is diminished nor denied or discounted **just that you are un- burdened of the load.**

It's not the offence but the inability to forgive that destroys you.

And that's a big part of forgiveness, there has been so much research secular and Christian that says physically, emotionally, and psychologically that forgiveness is good for YOU - it **Releases YOU**

So in Conclusion let's cry out to God that he will give us a real Sense of what we are saved from and what we have been forgiven for.

Let's make the choice to forgive because 'God has first forgiven us' but recognise if we don't forgive our eternal destiny is at stake.

Let us also choose not to remember it anymore.

Let's bless those that have offended us - not curse them.

And remember **it releases us and heals us to forgive** - and that God will have the final say in the area of wrongs done and the ultimate forgiveness.

Amen

Tony Troy

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