

## **THE DECISION IS YOURS #4**

### **“The Decision to Forgive”**

#### **I. Introduction**

##### **A. The Scariest Verses in the Bible**

1. After 50 years of Bible study, I have a list of what I call the scariest verses in the Bible, sober words that shake me up

a. At top of my list are Jesus’ words at the close of the Sermon on the Mount:

#### **Matthew 7:21-23**

**Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but 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 cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'**

b. “Not everyone” who calls Jesus Lord will make it; “Many” who call Jesus Lord will not make it. Scary. So much for the “easy-believism” of our day!

2. Last week we looked at another scary verse concerning Esau, the man who sold his birthright for a bowl of stew:

#### **Hebrews 12:17 NKJV**

**For you know that afterward, when he (Esau) wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.**

a. Esau proves that a person can pass the point where repentance is possible!

**3. But tonight I want to look at another scary thing, the fact that IF WE DO NOT MAKE THE DECISION TO FORGIVE OTHERS THEIR SINS AGAINST US, GOD WILL NOT FORGIVE OUR SINS AGAINST HIM!**

## II. 3 Places Jesus Says That God Will Not Forgive Us Our Sins

### A. First: At the End of the Lord's Prayer

1. We know the Lord's Prayer by heart; Matthew 6:9-13. It says, "Give us this day our daily bread...."

**Matthew 6:12** KJV

**And forgive us our debts (trespasses)  
as we forgive our debtors (those who trespass against us).**

a. This is how we normally say it; but this is a little off; the "As we forgive" phrase translates a Greek verb that is in the perfect tense; so it literally reads...

**Matthew 6:12**

**(several modern translations)**

**"forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors."**

b. It's not "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors; it's "forgive us our debts **AS WE HAVE FORGIVEN** our debtors!

c. Why is this important? Because it means that when we ask God to forgive us our sins, it *presupposes* that we *have forgiven* those who have sinned against us!

2. Jesus took time at the end of the prayer to drive this home:

**Matthew 6:14-15**

**If you forgive those who sin against you, your Heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.**

3. Notice that forgiveness is a decision; we can forgive, or we can refuse to forgive; if we forgive we will be forgiven; if we decide not to forgive other's sins against us, God will not forgive our sins against Him! Not only that. God will forgive us our sins **IN PROPORTION** to our forgiveness of the sins of others!

**"If we have totally forgiven others, we can expect total forgiveness from God. But if we withhold forgiveness from others, *even in a measure*, we cannot legitimately expect total forgiveness from God."**

**Derek Prince**

4. So we have a decision to make about the level of forgiveness we want to receive from God; that determines the level of forgiveness that we decide to give to others.

### **B. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Place: Mark 11:24**

1. The 2<sup>nd</sup> place where Jesus says God will not forgive our sins is in Mark 11:24-27, notice it is another place where He is teaching on prayer:

#### **Mark 11:24**

**Therefore I tell you that whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and you shall have it.**

2. I suppose I've heard a hundred sermons on the power of faith from this one verse; but most of them will omit what He says next:

#### **Mark 11:25**

**25 "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.**

a. When you want to pray for something from God, "If you have ANYTHING against ANYONE, forgive Him. He leaves no "wobble room". (KJV says "ought against any")

- If I have "anything"-big, small, in-between, against...
- Against "anyone"; my best friend, my worst enemy, or even a stranger.
- I am commanded to forgive them

b. Notice that God places no conditions to be met by the other person!

- He didn't say "forgive them if they say they're sorry"
- He didn't say "forgive them if they ask you to"
- He didn't say "forgive them if you think they deserve it."

3. Why must I make the decision to forgive? 2 reasons: the first is here in v.25. SO THAT my Father in heaven will forgive me. The 2<sup>nd</sup> is in v.26...

#### **Mark 11:26**

**But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."**

4. Remember that God forgives US in the same proportion as we forgive OTHERS!

a. Do I want God to forgive ALL my sins against Him? The condition is that I make the DECISION to forgive ALL the sins of others against me!

5. If we expect unconditional forgiveness from God we have to make the decision to give unconditional forgiveness to others.

**"It is amazing how much forgiveness we expect to receive from God and how little we are willing to give out to others.**

**Pastor Mark Hankins**

### **C. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Place**

1. The 3<sup>rd</sup> place where Jesus said God would not forgive us our sins is in Matthew 18, an entire chapter on the subject of forgiveness.

2. Jesus is teaching about handling offences in the Church and about "binding and losing":

#### **Matthew 18:18**

**Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.**

a. In one of his better moments, Peter realized that the He was talking about forgiveness!

#### **Matthew 18:21-22**

**21 Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times?**

**22 Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, until seven times: but, until seventy times seven.**

b. Some modern translations say "77" times; others think Jesus meant up to 490 times. But it's neither! It's not a literal number: Jesus said "70 times 7" as a metaphor for *unlimited* forgiveness!

3. And then Jesus spends the rest of the chapter teaching a parable on the kind of forgiveness He speaks of...

**Parable of the Unforgiving Servant**  
**Matthew 18:21-35**

**A man owed his master 10,000 talents of gold. A huge amount. Say \$20 million dollars. The servant has nothing to pay.**

**Matthew 18:26-27**

**The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.**

**27 Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.**

You would think the man would be humble and grateful. But no!

**Matthew 18:28-29**

**"But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii (say \$20); and he laid hands on him and took *him* by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!'**

The debtor falls down and begs for mercy and patience to repay; but no! He has him cast into prison. But then that story gets back to the man's Master, who had forgiven the \$20 million:

**Matthew 18:32-34**

**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. 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.**

Our unforgiveness makes God angry! His great mercy toward us requires our great mercy toward others! Notice that our unforgiveness puts us in prison and torment.

The bloodcurdling conclusion comes in the last verse of the chapter as Jesus applies the parable to us personally; just to make sure we don't miss the meaning...

### **Matthew 18:35**

**So likewise shall my Heavenly Father do also to you, if you from your hearts forgive not everyone his brother of his trespasses.**

4. The Bible says, “in the mouth of 2 or 3 witnesses let every word be established; I have given you 3 places where Jesus said God will not forgive us our sins against Him if we fail to forgive others their sins against us. (Matthew 6, Mark 11 and Matthew 18)

#### **D. The Money Metaphor**

1. Did you notice that in 2 of the 3 cases we studied, Jesus used the metaphor of money and debt; He compared sin with creating a debt.

- a. Forgive us our debts, AS WE FORGIVE our debtors
- b. In the Parable, the issue is not literal money, it’s “sin debts”

2. Here is how it works:

- When I sin against God, I have created a spiritual “debt” that must be paid; and there are only 2 ways it can be resolved. I must either pay the debt or God must forgive the debt. My problem is that I cannot repay the debt! The Good News of the Gospel is that JESUS CHRIST PAID MY SIN DEBT ON THE CROSS IN FULL AND THAT GOD FORGIVES MY SINS ON THE BASIS OF THE PRICE JESUS PAID.
- But my problem is what Bob Mumford called “post-baptismal sin”; sins I commit after I am saved; just because God forgave all my sins when I was saved does not mean that I am done with needing His forgiveness!
- Even though I am saved, I continue to sin; which creates new debts to God. And I can continue to get forgiveness from God on one condition: IF I FORGIVE THE SIN DEBTS OF OTHERS AGAINST ME!

3. I learned this early on in my Christian life from the great Derek Prince teaching that forgiving sins against us is like tearing up IOU’s.:

**FORGIVING IS LIKE TEARING UP “I.O.U’S”**

**Derek Prince**

**You have a lot of IOU’s in your hand from someone who’s done you wrong; they are legitimate; they are legal; you can hold onto them if you want to.**

**But God says, “Here in heaven I am holding a lot of IOU’s from you in My hand; let’s make a deal if you will tear up those IOU’s you have in your hand, on earth, all of them, I will tear up the IOU’s I have from you in heaven; but if you don’t tear yours up, I’ll hold on to Mine.”**

**You have to decide whether you will take the deal or not.**

4. The “Decision to Forgive” is tearing up all the IOUs! It cannot be made any clearer!

a. Alexander Pope, an 18<sup>th</sup> century English poet famously said...

**“To err is human, to forgive is divine.”**

**Alexander Pope**

a. We are never more human than when we sin; and we are never more like God than when we forgive those who sin against us! We are never more like Jesus than when we copy His model...

### **III. Models of Forgiveness**

The greatest example of forgiveness in human history is found in Christ on the Cross...

**Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.**

**Luke 23:34**

#### **A. Think of Others Who Have Modeled Forgiveness**

**“If we really want to love, we must learn to forgive.”**

**Mother Teresa**

1. **Corrie Ten Boom**’s parents were murdered by the Nazis in WWII and she and her sister were imprisoned in a German concentration camp, where the guards mistreated everyone. In her book, “The Hiding Place”, she tells of how God taught her how to forgive the cruelty of the guards.

**“Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart.”**

**Corrie Ten Boom**

a. Although her body was still in prison, her soul went free!

**“Forgiveness is the key that unlocks the door of resentment and the handcuffs of hatred.”**

**Corrie Ten Boom**

2. **Nelson Mandela** spent 27 years languishing in a South African prison at the hands of the white establishment; but after his release he led his nation out of racism and became the 1<sup>st</sup> black President in this history of his country. He was a model of forgiveness!

**“As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew that if I didn’t leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I’d still be in prison.”**

**Nelson Mandela**

a. He could have been bitter; he could have sought revenge against those who’d imprisoned him. But he said...

**“Resentment is like drinking poison hoping it will kill your enemies.”**

b. When asked, “how did you recover from such injustice?” he said...

**“When a deep injury is done to us, we never heal until we forgive.”**

**Nelson Mandela**

c. So true. And it reminds me of this famous quote from Lewis Smedes, a professor of Theology at Fullers Seminary for 25 years:

**“Forgiveness is to set a prisoner free, and then discover that prisoner was you.”**

**Lewis B. Smedes**

4. We carry grudges against people who don’t even know they have hurt us; they walk around free but we are all bound up! I have personally come to the place where my I tear up the IOU’s quickly! A great Russian novelist said...

**“Let us forgive each other. Only then will we live in peace.”**

**Leo Tolstoy**

5. Let me sum it up and leave it with this:



**“Forgiveness is a decision not an emotion. The initiative is with us not with others. And the way we relate to others determines the way God relates to us.”**

**Derek Prince**

## **B. Close: Answering 2 Common Questions**

1. I cannot finish without addressing 2 questions that may be in your minds as to this teaching:

### **Question #1**

Jesus says if I don't forgive I won't be forgiven.

So if a Christian dies with unforgiveness in their heart, will they still go to heaven? Yes. Those who are truly born again have received the gift of eternal life and there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. But your unforgiveness will displease your heavenly Father and make you miserable on earth. It also opens you up to the “tormentors”. (Matthew 18:34)

### **Question**

“I have made the decision to forgive but I still feel anger and resentment within me. Have I truly forgiven?”

I don't know if you have or not. I can only give you my personal testimony. Forgiveness is a decision not an emotion. I have forgiven men I did not feel like forgiving. But I made a decision. Later I have found feelings and resentments begin to arise; but I just tell my feelings to shut up and remind my soul the decision to forgive them has been made. It may take a few times; but for me, this always works.

**Forgiveness says, ‘I no longer hold this against you. I won't keep bringing this up to you. I won't talk about this with others behind your back.’**

**The Decision to Forgive is Yours!**

**Altar Call/Prayer**

**“To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable in others because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.”**

**C.S. Lewis**