

FELLOWSHIP NOTES ~ Sunday, May 9th, 2021
Spring Spiritual Growth Emphasis



Part 5: “Forgiveness: The Key to Holiness”
Matthew 18:15-35

For next Sunday, May 16th: Study and pray through pages 49-57 in *Returning to Holiness*.

For Further Study – In Fellowship Café

Book: *Forgiving Others* by Louis Husser

Book: *Safe in the Arms of God* by John MacArthur

Book: *The Pursuit of Holiness* by Jerry Bridges

Book: *Habits for Our Holiness* by Philip Nation

1. The word “forgiveness” is found 24 times in the New Testament; 14 of those times it is in the context of _____. (Matthew 6:12, 14-15; Mark 11:25; Luke 6:37, 11:4, 17:3-4, 23:34; John 20:23; 2 Corinthians 2:7, 10; Colossians 3:13)

2. The New Testament is replete with “_____”.

1.) Never are you more like God than when you _____.

2.) Unforgiveness is a _____ sin.

3.) Forgiveness is at the heart of God’s dealing with us, and it must be _____ in our relationships with others.

4.) Unforgiveness gives Satan an _____ in your life.

5.) The church – the body of Christ – is to be a place where forgiveness is part of our _____.



225 North Ave., Norwalk, IA. ~ www.fellowshipnorwalk.org

3. Jesus gave clear teaching about the need for forgiveness and its effect on our _____ (Matt. 18:21-25)

The Question: Does forgiveness have a _____? (Matt. 18:21)

The Answer: Forgiveness toward others is to be extended with _____ (Matt. 18:22)

The Illustration: The _____ Servant (Matt. 18:23-34)

The Principle: Unforgiveness on the part of any believer will bring the _____ of God (Matt. 18:35; Matt. 6:14-15)

Since forgiveness is part of God's character of holiness, as His children He wants it to likewise be part of our character. To refuse to forgive is a grievous sin against God and He will discipline us in order to conform our character to His, so that we are holy.

Growth Group Study Guide

Getting Started

"The man sitting across the table from me moved between anger and tears. His brother (who was also his business partner) had brought the company to the verge of bankruptcy – for the third time! 'He gets in trouble and starts siphoning off our money,' my friend explained. 'Then when we need the extra cash, it's gone.'" This man's brother was a Christian. Every time his misuse of company funds was exposed, he admitted his wrong and begged for forgiveness. This time his wounded brother wasn't sure he had strength to forgive him again."

Group Discussion: What advice would you offer this man?

Digging Deeper

When someone sins against us, that person is in our debt. They owe us something – an apology, compensation, restoration of what was lost. On Sunday morning we saw how Jesus used the theme of debtors to teach us a powerful lesson about forgiveness. Read together Matthew 18:21-35 and answer the following questions.

1. The religious leaders of Jesus' day taught that three times was the limit on forgiveness. Peter thought he was being gracious to extend it to seven times. What does Jesus' answer tell you about how important forgiveness is to God?
2. Is it difficult for you to have a God-honoring attitude when you are asked to forgive someone repeatedly for the same offense? Why?
4. Does Jesus' teaching about limitless forgiveness mean that we are not to hold others accountable for what they do? What are your thoughts?

5. In Jesus' story when the king cancelled the servant's outlandish debt, the king took the loss himself. What insight does that give you about what it means for us to forgive others?

6. Put into your own words what you believe Jesus is saying about what will happen in our lives if we refuse to forgive others.

7. (Not for group discussion) What person do you need to release from their debts to you?

Read through the following questions and feel free to discuss further any that the group has time to discuss.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TRUE REPENTANCE AND A MERE APOLOGY?

Genuine repentance always involves a confession of wrongdoing and a willingness to make things right. An apology often takes the form of an excuse. The word *apology* comes from the Greek *apologia*, which literally means "a speech in defense of." Apologies are often nothing more than self-defense: "I'm sorry if you took offense, but..." Genuine repentance is properly expressed in an admission of wrongdoing and a plea for forgiveness: "It was unthoughtful of me to say that. Will you forgive me?" Be wary of using merely apologetic language in place of genuine repentance.

TO WHOM SHOULD WE CONFESS OUR SIN?

Confession of guilt must always be made to God. Confession is also owed to whomever our sin has injured. The arena of confession should be as large as the audience of the original offense. Public transgressions call for public confession; private sins should be confessed to God alone.

WHAT IF I SIN WITH MY THOUGHTS AGAINST ANOTHER PERSON?

Only actual injuries require confession of a wrong. It would be inappropriate for a man who had a lustful thought to confess that thought to the woman who was the object of his lust. Confession in such cases should be made only to God. That does not, however, rule out confession in every case where the victim is unaware of the offense. If you have quietly slandered someone, that person may be unaware of the offense. Nonetheless, the offense is real. It needs to be made right not only with those who received the original slander, but also with the person who was slandered, even if that person is not yet aware of the offense.

SHOULD I CONFESS MY UNFAITHFULNESS TO MY SPOUSE, EVEN IF TELLING THEM MAY HURT THEM MORE THAN KEEPING IT A SECRET?

There is no doubt that in some cases confessing a sin may cause as much hurt as the offense itself. Nonetheless, it is important in all cases for the unfaithful party in a marriage relationship broken by adultery to confess the sin to his or her spouse. Why? For one thing, it takes two people to commit adultery. The other party in the sin already knows about the offense. It compounds your unfaithfulness to share a secret with your cohort in sin but keep your spouse in the dark. The lack of total openness – the need to hide things and keep secrets – will continue to be a barrier to the proper unity of the marriage. Something as serious as a breach in the marital union cannot be repaired if the truth must be kept from your marriage partner. Failure to confess simply compounds lying and cover-ups. That sort of thing will eventually destroy the relationship, whether or not the adultery is repeated. As difficult as it may be for both you and your spouse, you must deal honestly with a sin like this. If the offended spouse discovers the sin through other means, the hurt that is then caused will be drastically increased. You owe it to him or her to confess.

HOW SHOULD WE HANDLE REPEAT OFFENSES?

We've seen how Jesus handled this in Matthew 18 (it's also repeated in Luke 17). According to Jesus our forgiveness is supposed to be lavish, enthusiastic, eager, freely offered, and unconstrained – even for repeat offenders. After all, we are all repeat offenders against God.

WHEN IS RESTITUTION APPROPRIATE?

Whenever an actual loss has been caused by a wrong, restitution is certainly appropriate. The granting of forgiveness for the guilt of the offense does not automatically nullify the need to make reparations, especially when the injured party's loss is quantifiable. Whether the loss was caused deliberately (as in a theft) or accidentally (through some form of negligence), restitution should be made. In the Old Testament this was taught in Leviticus 24:18-21; Exodus 21:33-34; 22:1; and Numbers 5:6-7. In the New Testament Zaccheus offered fourfold restitution to those he had defrauded, more than the law required (Luke 19:8). That spirit of willingness to make restitution should accompany all true confession of wrongdoing. The purpose of restitution is simply to restore the value of the damages. Under Moses' law, when restitution was required over and above the actual amount of the loss, the purpose of the restitution was both to punish and to deter. The one forgiving is free, of course, to forego restitution and to choose to suffer the wrong without demanding repayment. But that is the offended person's option. The offender, if truly repentant, must be willing to right the wrong as much as is possible (Matthew 18:26,29).

WHAT RESTITUTION CAN BE MADE IF THE OFFENSE WAS A SIN LIKE LYING, SLANDER, DISHONORING ONE'S PARENTS, OR OTHER SINS WHERE NO ACTUAL VALUE CAN BE ATTACHED TO THE DAMAGE?

In some cases, tangible restitution is impossible, and yet reparations need to be made. Lies should be confessed and the truth communicated at least as widely as the lie was. Slander needs to be corrected by a sincere effort to restore the offended person's reputation and honor. Restitution in all such instances begins with a humble confession of the wrongdoing and a willingness to do whatever is reasonable to right the wrong.

WHAT IF I CANNOT FORGIVE MYSELF?

There are some who teach that a kind of self-forgiveness is necessary. However, this is not found in Scripture. Many people claim to be unable to forgive themselves, but on careful examination this usually turns out to be a kind of sinful pride exacerbated by modern self-esteem philosophy. The person who complains about not being self-forgiving is often simply looking for flattering or consoling words from others as a way of salving the hurt that guilt has caused to their pride. Christian counselor, Jay Adams, offers this insight: "The problem is not self-forgiveness. Their expressed agony stems from the very fact that, in the worst way, they want to forgive themselves. They want to put it all behind them, they want to bury it once and for all. The problem is that people who talk this way recognize something more needs to be done. Forgiveness is just the beginning; it clears away the guilt. They also recognize that they are still the same persons who did the wrong – that though they are forgiven, they have not changed. Without being able to articulate it and using instead the jargon they have heard all around them, they are crying out for the change that will assure them that they will never do anything like it again. When, as a counselor, I help them to deal with the problems in their lives that led to the wrong, in such a way that they lead a more biblical lifestyle, I then ask, 'Are you still having trouble forgiving yourself?' Invariably, they say no."

Wrapping it Up

If someone in your group is struggling with forgiveness, lift them up in prayer (details do not have to be shared with the group).

Continue studying and praying through our companion book Returning to Holiness. This week work through page 57. Let's also continue to fast and pray together for our Road to Holiness Emphasis that God will continue to work in our hearts and lives in regard to sin, cleansing and holy living (use prayer requests on the back of the reading schedule).