

## 41. Jesus Taught About the Importance of Forgiving

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to pray in faith. We saw that we also want to help them learn to pray for the will of God. Jesus promised that such prayers will be answered, even when it involves things that are seemingly impossible. In this topic, we are going to see that Jesus taught the disciples about the importance of forgiving.

Jesus had just been teaching the disciples about praying in faith. In these verses, we see that Jesus went on to relate answered prayer to forgiving others. Mark 11:25-26 says, “And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.” These verses teach us some key lessons about prayer and forgiveness.

The Jews normally stood when they prayed in public. In fact, Jesus warned in His Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 6:5-6, that the people were not to be hypocrites when they prayed publicly. “And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.” We see that the Lord wants prayer that comes from the heart.

In this passage, we see that such a right heart attitude is related to forgiveness. Jesus said that when we pray, we are to forgive any person we have anything against. This includes both a Christian, and one who is not a Christian. It can be for some sin of that person, or even something that is not a sin. Ephesians 4:32 explains why we are to forgive, when that verse says: “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” This verse makes it clear that we are to forgive others because of the fact that God has forgiven us. The Father forgave us for all of our sins, so we should forgive others for their sins against us.

An unwillingness to forgive others may show that there has never been true repentance of our sin of unbelief. Hebrews 12:15-17 warns, “Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there *be* any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.” Paul also gave a warning in 2 Corinthians 13:5, which says, “Examine yourselves *as to* whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified.” That is why Jesus warned that the Father will not forgive those who are unwilling to forgive, because it shows a heart of unbelief.

When Jesus arrived at the temple that day, He was immediately questioned by the religious leaders about who gave Him authority to cleanse the temple. Mark 11:27-28 says, “Then they came again to Jerusalem. And as He was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to Him. And they said to Him, ‘By what authority are You doing these things? And who

gave You this authority to do these things?” Here, we see that these religious leaders were illustrating the very thing Jesus had just talked about with His disciples. These religious leaders had no desire to accept the cleansing of the temple, because they were greedy for the money they collected from those who bought and sold in the temple. As a result, they asked Jesus two questions which showed the unbelief in their hearts.

The first question was, “By what authority are You doing these things?” Jesus had answered this question much earlier in His ministry when confronted by the religious leaders. Jesus said, in John 5:17, “But Jesus answered them, ‘My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.’” We see the reaction of the Jews that day in John 5:18, where we read: “Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.” The religious leaders were unwilling to accept this earlier statement of Jesus. They showed by their questions that they were still unwilling to accept the fact that Jesus is God and has all authority.

The second question was, “Who gave You this authority to do these things?” Jesus had spoken to these religious leaders in John 5:22-23, and said, “For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.” In this statement, Jesus told the religious leaders the source of His authority. That was the fact they did not want to accept. Jesus could have also answered this question with the statement He made to His followers after His resurrection. Matthew 28:18 says, “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.’” However, Jesus knew that the real problem of the religious leaders was their unbelief and that they would not accept anything Jesus said.

Jesus promised the religious leaders that He would answer their questions, if they would answer His question to them about the baptism of John. Mark 11:29-33 says: “But Jesus answered and said to them, ‘I also will ask you one question; then answer Me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things: The baptism of John—was it from heaven or from men? Answer Me.’ And they reasoned among themselves, saying, ‘If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ But if we say, ‘From men’—they feared the people, for all counted John to have been a prophet indeed. So they answered and said to Jesus, ‘We do not know.’ And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.’”

Suddenly, the religious leaders had a problem, when Jesus asked, “The baptism of John—was it from heaven or from men? Answer Me.” The discussion among themselves shows that they knew the answer to the question of Jesus. However, that created a problem for them. If they answered what they knew was the truth, they would show that their hearts were filled with unbelief. Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” Jeremiah certainly explained what the hearts of the religious leaders were like. They were desperately wicked, because Jesus had done many signs to prove that He is God, and they were unwilling to come to Him in repentance and faith. Instead, in their efforts to try and continue to deceive the people about their own lack of spiritual life, they refused to answer. They did not want Jesus to ask them why they did not believe John the Baptist.

At the same time, we see that the religious leaders were driven by their own fear. 1 John 4:18 says, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.” Those who have come to Christ in repentance and faith will be led by the love of Christ as they yield to the Holy Spirit. In contrast, those who have hearts of unbelief will be driven by the fear of men. That was exactly what happened in the lives of these religious leaders. We see that the religious leaders feared the people. The religious leaders recognized that the people considered John a great prophet. That caused the religious leaders to act out of their own fear. They were unwilling to answer the question of Jesus because of their fear of the people. Finally, they told Jesus that they did not know whether the baptism of John was from heaven or from men.

In the same way, we see that many people are so controlled by their own fear, they are afraid to say what they believe. In addition, they are unwilling to do what they know is right, and will do what they know is wrong, in order to please people. People will have a godly fear and reverence for God, or they will fear people. That was why the religious leaders said, “But if we say, ‘From men—they feared the people, for all counted John to have been a prophet indeed.’” They lacked a fear and reverence for God. As a result, they were filled with fear about the reaction of the people, if they denied that the baptism of John was from God.

Once the religious leaders gave their answer, we see that Jesus told them that since they would not answer His question, He would not tell them by whose authority He had stopped those who were buying and selling in the temple. Jesus had told them by whose authority He had cleansed the temple when He cleansed it the first time at the beginning of His ministry. John 2:16 says, “And He said to those who sold doves, ‘Take these things away! Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise!’” In this verse, Jesus had said that the temple was His Father’s house. However, the religious leaders did not want to accept the statement of Jesus, because they were unwilling to believe in Him.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to understand the fact that there are religious people who refuse to believe that Jesus is the Christ. Such individuals have developed their own form of religion which denies the power of God, and refuses to come to the Father through Christ. Paul warned Timothy, in 2 Timothy chapter 3, that the day would come when there would be many such people. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to recognize those who refuse to believe in Christ.