

56. Jesus Taught About Forgiveness

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to explain to others that there is a judgment that faces all those who reject Jesus. We saw that Jesus gave a warning to the Pharisees by telling them what had happened to both Lazarus and the rich man when they died. Lazarus believed and received life. The rich man rejected and received judgment. As we come to our topic today, we are going to see that Jesus taught His disciples about the importance of forgiving others.

Jesus taught the disciples what to do when a brother sins against them. We see that they were told to rebuke but they were also told to forgive. Luke 17:1-4 says, “Then He said to the disciples, ‘It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe *to him* through whom they do come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him.’” Jesus began by warning that offenses would come.

The word translated “offenses” means *anything placed in the way of another person causing that person to stumble or fall*. Romans 14:13 says, “Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in *our* brother's way.” In this verse, the word is translated “a cause to fall”. In the world, people will try to cause Christians to stumble or try to cause us to fall. However, here we see that as Christians we are not to judge or do anything that would cause a brother to stumble or to fall. Jesus made it clear that there will be grief to the Christian who places an obstacle or causes another Christian to stumble. Christ said that was especially true if a Christian would hinder or offend a young or weak Christian.

However, there will be times when other Christians do judge us or place obstacles in our way. In some cases, a brother will sin against us in ways that can be very painful. We are told what to do when a Christian does sin against us. We are told to rebuke the other Christian. The word translated “rebuke” is the opposite of honor. Instead of complaining or talking to others about the person, we are to speak directly to the person in love and explain the sin that the person has committed against us. We are then to give the person the opportunity to repent. The word translated “repent” means *to change one's mind or purpose for the better*. When used of one who is not a Christian, it means to turn from sin and to turn to God. When used of a Christian, it means that the person makes the choice to ask the person against whom he or she has sinned for forgiveness.

Jesus told the disciples that if they rebuked a person and that person repented they were to forgive the person. The word translated “forgive” means *to let go or to send away*. When Jesus forgave our sins, He removed them as far as the east is from the west, He buried them in the depths of the sea, He blotted them out and He promised that He will remember them no more. In the same way, true forgiveness means that we will not hold that thing against that person any longer. In fact, Jesus said that if a person sins against us seven times in a day and returns to say that he has

repented, we are to forgive the person each time.

This is extremely important for both the other person and for us because that is what makes it possible to keep the unity of the body of Christ. Jesus told Peter, in Matthew 18:21-22, “Then Peter came to Him and said, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’” Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.’” Here, we see that Jesus made it clear that we are to continue to forgive each time a person repents.

When Jesus told the disciples to forgive even if it meant forgiving seven times in one day, we see the response of the disciples in Luke 17:5-6, where we read, “And the apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith.’” So the Lord said, ‘If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, “Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,” and it would obey you.’” Many of the rabbis taught the Jews that it was not necessary to forgive a person more than three times. As a result, the teaching of Jesus was radically different from that of the Jewish rabbis when Jesus told the apostles that they should forgive a person that repented seven times in a single day. That is why they asked Jesus to increase their faith.

Jesus answered their statement by using the mustard seed as an illustration. Jesus described a mustard seed in Mark 4:31-32, where we read, “*It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth; but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade.*” A mustard seed was the smallest seed that the Jews planted. However, that seed produced a bush that might grow to between ten and fifteen feet high and have large enough branches for a bird to build its nest. Our faith may be small; but, if that faith is in a big God, He can do all things in us and through us that He chooses to do. If our faith is in God, He can and will do what is impossible for us to do.

Jesus went on to give an illustration of the fact that it is our duty to ask Him for the strength to forgive other Christians when they sin against us. Luke 17:7-10 says, “‘And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, “Come at once and sit down to eat”? But will he not rather say to him, “Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink”? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, “We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.”’”

The word translated “servant” is the word for a bondsman. This is a word that Paul frequently used. In Philippians 1:1, we read, “Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.” Paul called himself and Timothy bondservants of Jesus Christ. Then, in 2 Timothy 2:24-26, we read, “And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so *that* they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses *and escape* the snare of the devil, having been taken captive

by him to *do* his will.” Here, we see the attitude that we are to have when we rebuke a brother because this is the kind of attitude that will keep the unity of the faith.

Since we are also bondservants of Jesus, He gave the illustration of a bondservant who came in from working in the field. A bondservant may have been working out in the field all day or been herding the sheep all day. Since that person is a bondservant (slave), he did not expect his master to have supper ready for him when he came in from the field. Instead, a slave expected the master to tell him to prepare supper for his master. The slave was expected to feed his master first before he even thought about his own need for food. Only after the master was satisfied could the slave go and prepare his own supper.

The slave did not expect the master to thank him for preparing and serving the meal. Jesus wanted the disciples in that day and we who are followers of Jesus today to realize that we are to be obedient servants. As Christians, we can look forward to eternal rewards as we follow the instructions of 1 Corinthians 10:31, “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” Meanwhile, on this earth, we do not need any special honor to motivate us to carry out the work that the Lord has called us to do. Instead, our motivation for serving the Lord is explained in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, where we read, “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.” It is the love of Christ that He has shown for us that motivates us and not the desire for honor in this world.

The word translated “was our duty” means *what we ought to do or what we owe*. The word is translated “ought” in John 13:14, where we read, “If I then, *your* Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.” In this verse, Jesus explained to the disciples that it was their and our duty to serve one another as Christians. In Romans 15:1, we read, “We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves.” In this verse, we see that as stronger Christians we are to be patient with those who are weaker Christians as a part of our ministry to them. Ephesians 5:28 says, “So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.” This verse makes it clear that it is the duty of the husband to love his wife as he loves his own body. Finally, 1 John 4:11 says, “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” The reason that we realize that it is our duty to love one another is due to the fact that God has already shown that love to us.

Jesus taught us that we are to forgive one another and love one another. In the same way, we want to show our physical and spiritual children by our example the importance of forgiving and loving others. They will learn to forgive and love as they see our example of forgiveness and love. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to forgive and how to love as God loved us.