

35.5 Forgiven to Be Forgiving

Psalm 32:1-2 (NKJV):

**Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,
Whose sin is covered.**

**² Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity,
And in whose spirit there is no deceit.**

Historians have attributed the saying "**to err is human, to forgive is divine**" to **Alexander Pope** in the 18th century. Like me, you know the tension between the earnest need to be forgiven and the challenge to forgive. We want forgiveness, but we often don't forgive.

The Bible teaches us about forgiveness. Jesus came into the world to save sinners, which included their forgiveness before God. Notice His words as He hung on the cross in **Luke 23:34** (NKJV):

Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."

We pray, "**And forgive us our debts,**" in the first part of **Matthew 6:12**. But how hard is it for us to complete the verse in our prayers? Can we say and mean, "**As we forgive our debtors**"? Don't we prefer to hold onto our grudges and withhold our forgiveness?

Peter asked Jesus a common question in **Matthew 18:21** (NKJV), "**Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?**" Jesus answered him with "**I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven**" in **verse 22**. He then told a story in **Matthew 18:23-35** to illustrate His answer. Let me summarize the story, but I encourage you to read it.

A king went out to settle his accounts with his servants. One servant owed a massive debt but could not repay it. He appealed to the king, and the king forgave him because he was compassionate towards the servant.

The servant then found a fellow servant who owed him a small amount. When the debtor could not pay, the servant had him thrown into prison despite his appeals for patience and mercy.

The king's servants heard of this and reported to the king. The king was furious. He had shown compassion on his servant over a large debt. Shouldn't the servant have shown compassion regarding a small one? He reversed his debt forgiveness and sent the man to the torturers until he had paid in full.

Jesus makes a specific application to us in **Matthew 18:35** (NKJV):

"So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."

Does this sound familiar? It hits home with me. In our pride, don't we struggle with our willingness to forgive others?

Some of our American forefathers exemplified the power of forgiveness in their lives. In addition to being role models in governance, politics, and our struggle for independence, they were often spiritual role models.

Timothy Pickering was a General in the American Revolution. He also served as the Secretary of State for Presidents George Washington and John Adams. On one occasion, Pickering received a letter from an associate, asking him to forgive him for how he had treated Pickering. Note his response:

Whatever imperfections or faults are in my character, I trust that implacability [hard-heartedness] forms no part of it. As a man, it would do me honor – as a Christian; it is my indispensable duty – to forgive those who offend me.¹

The challenge we face is the willingness to forgive the slights and inconsideration of others. First, we forgive our fellow servants of their minor trespasses against us. Then Our King will forgive our major trespasses against Him. But what happens if we don't forgive them? He won't forgive us.

It is not always easy. People can be cruel and inconsiderate. Yet, it is always right because, at times, we are too.

One of the reasons America is in our current crisis is because we have forgotten the Bible. Our Founders had a biblical worldview that began by applying it to their personal lives and national life. They knew that everything was not about them and their pride. There were more significant issues. So they humbled themselves repeatedly before the Lord.

I remember years ago that I borrowed some money from my parents. They decided to forgive my debt as I began paying back the loan. One attribute they both shared was generosity.

I had two immediate sensations. First, I had a deep sense of gratitude for their gift of debt forgiveness. Second, I wished someone had owed me even a tiny debt so that I could likewise forgive their loan. I was a very poor, struggling preacher who barely had enough money to live on, let alone able to loan money. That desire to forgive as they forgave me was there.

There are more significant debts than money. God has granted me the forgiveness of an extensive debt of what we call 'sin.' That happened at the cross. When Jesus said, "**It is finished**" in **John 19:30**, He used a word that meant, "***Paid in full.***" His death forgives our debts to God.

The challenge is to be willing to forgive as we have been forgiven. Join with me and work on letting pride and selfish ambition go. Let's learn to be humble and dependent on God so that we can become like Him.

Keep The Light of *Forgiveness* Burning!

¹ Charles W. Upham. The Life of Timothy Pickering (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1873), Vol. III, pp. 15-16. Cited in the Founders' Bible by David Barton, pp. 1467-69.