

Eternity Daily Bible Study

The Importance Of Love

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Number: 22

Verses: Matthew 6:12-15

Topic: Love Forgives Debts

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Matthew 6:12-15 *And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. (13) And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. (14) "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. (15) But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

The Greek word use here for debts is *opheilema* and has the sense of a "a thing justly or legally due, a thing owed, a financial or moral debt" . The word "as" literally means "because" so a more literal rendering of verse 12 would be:

"And forgive us all that we owe to God, both financially and legally and morally because we are also forgiving others of everything they owe us, financially, legally and morally".

This verse tells us that God lets us off the hook BECAUSE we also let others off the hook. (The phrase "let off the hook" conveys the exact sense of the Greek word *aphes / aphiemi* or to "forgive, release, depart from, disregard a matter, let alone".) This is further amplified in verses 14 and 15 above which state that if we forgive, we are in turn forgiven, however if we refuse to forgive, then we are (quite justly) not forgiven.

One of the great "rules of thumb" is that God will treat us as we also treat others e.g. blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy, God deliver us if we deliver the poor (Job 29:11,12; Psalm 41:1), God refuses to consider the prayer of the inconsiderate (1 Peter 3:7) and so on. This especially applies to the area of forgiveness and having power over others. There is of course the terrifying end of the parable of the unforgiving servant:

Matthew 18:32-35 *Then his lord, after he had called him, said to him, O wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. (33) Should you not also have pitied your fellow servant, even as I had pity on you? (34) And his lord was angry, and delivered him to the tormentors until he should pay all that was due to him. (35) So likewise shall My heavenly Father do also to you, unless each one of you from your hearts forgive his brother their trespasses.*

In this parable a servant who owed an immense amount of money, ten thousand talents (one talent was about 75lbs of gold) and is forgiven, attacks and imprisons a fellow servant who owes him the equivalent of about a hundred dollars. The king is furious and throws that wicked and unforgiving servant into jail because he did not also let his fellow servant off the hook of his financial obligations.

Now please remember that Matthew had been a tax-collector. In fact Matthew was probably the chief tax-collector at Capernaum and one of the three chief tax collectors in all Israel (also along with Zaccheus the chief tax collector at Jericho). Now what does an ancient Jewish-Roman tax-collector know about debt-collecting, thuggery and about never letting anyone off the hook? Quite a lot would be my guess!

Matthew had previously made his living by exacting "the last penny" out of people and "handing them over to the jailers" if they refused to pay! Just as Paul went from ultra-legalism to the apostle of grace, so Matthew's conversion transformed him from Mr. Super-Scrooge to penning the gospel of forgiveness!

For Matthew this was very real, and for us today in our "business mentality" world it should also be very real. We should never use our power over others to exact every last cent from them. We should forget about the fifty dollars that was never paid back. We should let family grudges pass on by, and we should not go around constantly saying "but you owe me". Christians should be soft-hearted! Besides the things that are not repaid now will be repaid later at the resurrection of the just:

Luke 14:13-14 *But when you make a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, (14) and you shall be blessed, for they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.*

Expecting an exact return is worldly thinking, the thinking of sinners, and Christians are to go way beyond that kind of mentality to the mentality of grace and of heavenly reward:

Luke 6:34-36 *And if you lend to those of whom you hope to receive, what thanks do you have? For sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. (35) But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return. And your reward shall be great, and you shall be the sons of the Highest. For He is kind to the unthankful and to the evil. (36) Therefore be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.*

The concept of "debt" is very broad and is much bigger than just iniquities, sins and trespasses! It is everything that we have some sort of legal or moral power to extract from one another. Divorce settlements, house repossessions, social obligations, and even sexual expectations within marriage!

Adult children often feel that they are owed a huge "love debt" by uncaring, selfish or abusive parents who ruined their childhood and who have never expressed much in the way of affection. And there are indeed some truly awful parents out there who impose cruel and excruciating childhoods on their offspring. However carrying this "love debt" around inside of us does us no good at all! We may not be able to excuse their behavior or justify their behavior but we can let go of that "love debt" and forgive their behavior!

You do not have to say that black is white or that evil is good, but you have to let go of that darkness and evil and let your parents "off the hook" of your rage and hurt! God will forgive you because you have forgiven your parents! One way to do this is by writing a "letter to God" about your childhood, listing your grief and pain, then stating your forgiveness and closure of the issues, and then burning it! No one needs to see it!

I now live in Southern California which is probably the most litigious place on earth and where there are (I am told) about one-third of the world's lawyers! These numerous attorneys are being hit hard by the recession and are now encouraging everyone to sue everyone else! This includes Christians taking legal actions against their churches and pastors and against one another. Scripture clearly forbids this:

1 Corinthians 6:1-8 *Does any of you, having a matter against another, dare go to court before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? (2) Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? (3) Do you not know that we will judge angels? Let alone ordinary matters! (4) If then you have ordinary lawsuits, you appoint those who are disdained within the church to judge. (5) I say this to your shame. So is there not among you a wise man, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brother and another? (6) But brother goes to court against brother, and this before unbelievers! (7) Already therefore, it is actually a defeat for you that you have lawsuits against one another. Why not rather accept wrong? Why not rather accept being defrauded? (8) But you wrong and defraud, and these things to your brothers!*

Christians are to be tender-hearted and to let each other off the hook as sinners forgiving each other, in the love of God!

Ephesians 4:30-32 *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you are sealed until the day of redemption. (31) Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and tumult and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. (32) And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you.*

Philippians 2:1-4 *If there is therefore any encouragement in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any tenderesses and mercies, (2) then fulfill my joy, that you may be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord and of one mind. (3) Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves. (4) Do not let each man look upon his own things, but each man also on the things of others.*

Colossians 3:12-14 *Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender feelings of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, (13) forbearing one another and forgiving yourselves, if anyone has a complaint against any. As Christ forgave you, so also you do. (14) And above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness.*

"As Christ forgave you, so also you do". We should treat others tenderly and mercifully just as God in Christ treats us, "forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you" and not grieving the Spirit or breaking the unity and fellowship of the Holy Spirit!

Let go of your indignation, wrath and fury; for the wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God (James 1:20)! Start letting people off the hook! Let your kids off the hook, your parents off the hook, and your friends and church mates off the hook. Even let your pastor, God and the cosmos in general off the hook! Find mercy in your soul and live it out, for merciful love is Christ in you, the hope of glory!

Prayer: *Lord teach us to forgive others as You indeed have forgiven us!*

Blessings,

John Edmiston
Chairman/ CEO
Cybermissions

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