

The Unforgiving Servant



Forgiveness (Part 4)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again, sharing with you truths and insights that have made the difference between success and failure in my life—and can do the same in yours.

Our theme for this week is: Forgiveness.

In my talk yesterday I emphasized again the two directions of forgiveness—vertical and horizontal—as illustrated by the cross. Remember I said there two beams to the cross—the vertical and the horizontal—they meet in the middle. The vertical beam represents our relationship with God; the horizontal beam represents our relationship with our fellow men. All of us need forgiveness vertically from God, and all of us need both to forgive and to be forgiven by our fellow men. And the only basis, the only way in which it is made possible is through the death of Jesus on the cross. He was the meeting point. In Him the enmities and the divisions were resolved. The barriers were broken down. Racial divisions, class divisions, caste divisions, every kind of thing that separates man from man, and man from God—every enmity was done away with by the death of Jesus on the cross, so that He made peace through His blood. He proclaimed peace both to the Jews and to the Gentiles - to the entire human race He proclaimed God's offer of peace and reconciliation.

Today, I'm going to focus once more on the necessity of our forgiving one another. That's on the horizontal plane. I'll be looking in turn at three passages of the New Testament in which Jesus Himself lays special emphasis on the necessity to forgive others.

The first passage is very familiar. It's the Lord's prayer as recorded in Matthew chapter 6 verses 9 through 15. Jesus says:

> "This is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will

> also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

It's interesting that of all the sections of that prayer, which, we call normally the Lord's prayer, there was only one passage of which Jesus thought it worthwhile to make specific comment. And that was on the passage where He said, "Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors." Notice He lays down the proportion in which we can ask forgiveness from God. It's the same proportion in which we forgive others. "Forgive us our debts AS we also have forgiven our debtors." If we totally forgive others, we can ask God totally to forgive us. But if we withhold total forgiveness to others then we cannot claim total forgiveness from God.

And this is what Jesus comments. He says, and it's the only passage that He comments on in the Lord's prayer, "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." No language could be clearer than that. Do we want God to forgive us? We have no option, we have to forgive others. There's no alternative. Only as we forgive others will God forgive us.

The second passage on this theme is in Mark chapter 11 verses 24 and 25. Again it is Jesus who is speaking. He's speaking about how to get our prayers answered, and He says this:

> "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

You see, Jesus puts upon us when we pray the responsibility to forgive others. He does not say, "Wait until they come and ask for your forgiveness." He says "No, if you want your prayers to get through to God, you yourself take the initiative. Forgive those other persons." I don't believe it's necessary to go to them and tell them of it in most cases. But you have to release them, because as long as you hold them in their debts to you, God is holding out your debt to Him. And remember your debt to God is infinitely greater than the debt any human being owes you. So Jesus says, "Forgive him, no matter what he has done." His language is so complete. If you hold anything against anyone, forgive him. Anything against anyone. That doesn't leave out anything or anyone does it?

There's no situation, no circumstance in which we can justify ourselves from refusing forgiveness to others if we want forgiveness from God. Particularly Jesus is saying at this point, if we want God to answer our prayers—He said as a matter of fact when you pray believe that you receive what you're praying for as you pray. But He says, here's the potential problem. You may not be able to believe it, you may not have the faith to receive it, if you haven't forgiven others. So, when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.

Have problems with unanswered prayer? Have you felt sometimes that you were crying out and the heavens were brass? And God's ears were stopped against your prayer? Has it ever occurred to you that God has been waiting for you to learn the lesson, that if you want Him to hear your prayers you must begin by forgiving anybody that you may be holding anything against?

The third passage that deals with the necessity of our forgiving others is the parable of the unforgiving servant found in Matthew chapter 18 verses 21 through 35. It's quite lengthy, but I'm going to read the entire parable because it's so vivid and it's got such important lessons for all of us:

> "Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?' Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. [Notice, this is the application of the principal, the parable] As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. [I worked out once that that at a certain rate of the dollar to silver, and of course that fluctuates, but at a certain rate it was about six million dollars. A man who owed him six million dollars was brought to him.] Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' [He knew he couldn't. The master knew that too.] The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. [Which I worked out at the same ratio was worth about 17 dollars. So we're talking about 17 dollars versus six million.] He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and

> begged him, [in just the same words that he'd used to his master] 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master turned him over to the jailers [The King James version says tormentors. And that's an accurate rendering of the original Greek. 'Turned him over to the tormentors.' People who were going to torture him until he came up with the payment.] In anger his master turned him over to the jailers [or tormentors] until he should pay back all he owed. [Now this is the comment of Jesus at the end of this story.] 'This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.'"

So, Jesus doesn't leave it as just a general story with a nice moral to it. He applies it specifically to each of us. He says you saw what happened to that unforgiving servant. His master became angry with him and having first cancelled his debt, then threw him into prison to the tormentors until he should pay everything. He said if you don't forgive your fellow believers, your fellow human beings as you want God to forgive you, than God will deal with you just like the master dealt with that unforgiving servant.

That to me is a terrible warning. It comes straight from the lips of Jesus. No one was more ready to forgive and be gracious than Jesus, but He set certain principals, certain limits. He said if you want to be forgiven by God, you must forgive others.

Let me point out three points that emerged from that story. First of all, unforgiveness is wickedness. The master said to the servant, "You wicked servant." What was his wickedness? He hadn't committed some great crime, he had simply failed to forgive his fellow servant. Failure to forgive is wickedness. Secondly, it says that the master was angry. Another version says he had wrath. So unforgiveness provokes God's anger, because there is an exact parallel between the master and the servant, and God and you and me. And the third is that unforgiveness delivers us to the tormentors, because Jesus said, "My heavenly Father will deal exactly with you as that master dealt with that servant." And that unforgiving servant was delivered to the tormentors.

Do you know that there are multitudes of God's people in the hand of tormentors today because the fail to forgive somebody. Some have mental torment, some have spiritual torment, some have physical torment. There are many different kinds of torment. But one sure result of unforgiveness is torment. Let me warn you right now, make it your decision to forgive as you want God to forgive you.

Our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I'll be giving practical instruction on how to forgive. Many people say, "I can't forgive." But that's not true. You can, if you know how.

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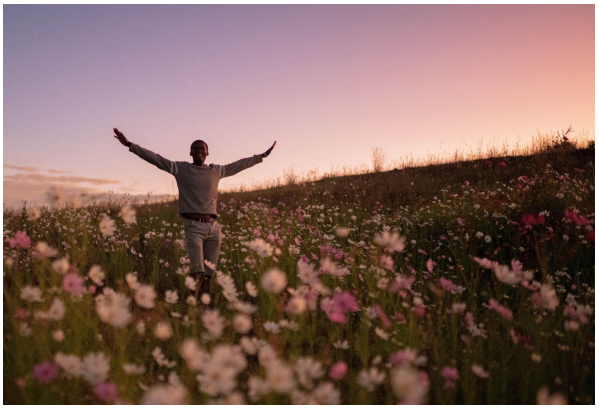

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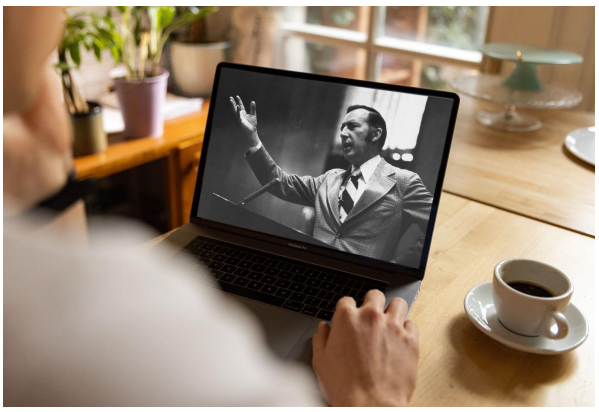

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