

Sunday School Lesson for the Month of May, 2023

The Biblical Perspective on Bitterness!

(Luke 17:3-10)

(Sunday, May 7, 2023)

In Luke 17:3-10, Jesus instructs his disciples with practical suggestions for handling the anger that can soar quickly into bitterness. The Lord speaks of aggressive and courageous forgiveness as a Christian Alternative.

I. Confront the Offender (vs. 3)

The Bible encourages loving, truthful confrontation. This passage gives the offended party the responsibility for open communication. Other New Testament passages require the one who has created an offense to initiate reconciliation – combining these messages, this means that two mature Christians, upon realizing there is a breach in their relationship, should come together and resolve the conflict.

II. Forgive Without Limits (vs. 4)

- A. The Lord says that seven times is not too much to forgive the same person for the same offense in one day. Elsewhere, the number used is seventy times seven. Jesus says that we are to forgive others with the same infinite grace with which we are forgiven by God.
- B. Victims often respond to forgiving their offenders with the attitude reflected in this statement, “forgive? – But you don’t understand what he or she did to me!” This is a misunderstanding of the issue. The bitterness that grows from the seeds of unforgiveness produces a deadly poison that prevents forgiveness. There is no limit to forgiveness.

(Sunday, May 14, 2023)

III. Forgive because you want to be obedient to God, not because you feel like forgiving! (vs. 5-9)

- A. The disciples responded to this command of Jesus by pleading, “Lord, increase our faith.” They weren’t really saying that they couldn’t do this; God would have to empower them. Christ indicates that the real issue here is not faith, but obedience and discipline.
- B. Jesus then tells a parable about a servant who returns weary from his day’s work yet proceeds to prepare and serve his master’s evening meal. The servant did not “feel like” doing this chore, but he did it because it was his duty as a servant. It is our job to forgive; it is not an option.

(Sunday, May 21, 2023)

IV. Forgive out of Obedience to God, not because the offender deserves forgiveness! (vs. 5-9)

- A. Nothing in this passage relates forgiveness to a person’s worthiness to be forgiven. God does not gauge His forgiveness of sinful humanity by our worthiness, and for this blessed fact, we will be eternally grateful.
- B. The demanding master may not deserve to be served, and the overworked servant may not deserve to be abused, Nonetheless, the servant quietly lives out his servanthood. So, the Christian goes through life forgiving those who offend him as a witness to the grace by which he has been forgiven. After all, grace, by its very definition, is undeserved.

(Sunday, May 28, 2023)

V. Forgive without being proud! (vs. 10)

There is a subtle kind of pride that we can develop when we forgive. It is an attitude toward the forgiven that implies, “I have forgiven you, you rotten sinner, because I’m so much more righteous and spiritual than you.” This kind of self-righteousness can make a person a Pharisee. This proud piety can make

a person as unchristian as hateful bitterness can. So, we are to forgive in a spirit of humble obedience to God of whom we have been forgiven.

There are some very good psychological as well as spiritual reasons for not harboring bitterness in your heart:

1. Forgive others for Jesus' sake. It is His will for us to forgive others as an act of devotion to Him.
2. Forgive others for your sake. Even selfish motives should move us to want to get rid of self-destructive bitterness.
3. Forgive others for their sake. The Christian duty to allow God's love to flow through us to others is fulfilled in extending forgiveness.

I notice that there is a frightening phrase in the model prayer in which we say, "and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." What if God answered that prayer and forgave you in precisely the same measure you extend forgiveness to others?