

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON FOR THE MONTH OF AUGUST 2013

The Discipline of Forgiveness

(Matthew 18:21-35)

SUNDAY, AUGUST 4, 2013

How do you respond to mistreatment and injury? All of us have to admit that when we are mistreated, we find it difficult to have the mind of Christ and to demonstrate the Spirit of Christ toward those who mistreat us. But responding with anger, hostility, bitterness, and retaliation is the Devil's way of destroying your home, your family, and your fellowship with others.

I. Dealing with the pain of being mistreated.

Every human being experiences mistreatment from others. How we deal with this will to a large degree determine our total well being in life.

- A. Some have suffered abuse and mistreatment by their parents or by others in positions of authority over them while they were young and helpless.
- B. Many people experience repeated mistreatment in marriage. Can you imagine how many mates are abused in marriage? Marriage provides the occasion for the experience of anger more than any other relationship in life because of its length and the close relationship it represents between two human beings, who at times may threaten one another.
- C. Parents often experience painful injury through the immature and selfish conduct of their children.
- D. Many experience pain and agony because of the stupidity and selfishness of a brother or sister.
- E. Many people experience pain in their vocations or on the job where they earn their living.

Peter must have experienced discomfort and injury within family relationships, because he came to our Lord with the question, "***Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?***"

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II. The teachings of our Lord regarding forgiveness.

Our Lord comes through crisp and clear on how we are to deal with injury and mistreatment.

- A. Our Lord specifically forbids retaliation! We are to avoid being vindictive and revengeful. We are to avoid striking out and returning evil for evil, curse for curse, blow for blow, injury for injury.
- B. Our Lord does not suggest that we suppress hostile feelings and ignore the injuries and mistreatment that we experience at the hands of others.
- C. Our Lord does not suggest that we retreat into self-pity, which can lead to discouragement, despair, and depression.
- D. Our Lord specifically places on us the obligation to give the gift of forgiveness to those who mistreat us.

We have a natural impulse to retaliate. We may find it difficult to be forgiving because we labor under the impression that to be forgiving may encourage continued mistreatment. Or we may find it difficult to be forgiving because we want the one who injured us to be worthy and to deserve the gift of forgiveness. Forgiveness is always an undeserved gift. God gives us the gift of forgiveness. If we wait until someone deserves forgiveness, we will harbor feelings of anger and hostility toward the person always.

Our Lord not only taught but practiced the habit of forgiving. While on the cross suffering for the sins of a guilty people, He prayed, “*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*” [Luke 23:34].

SUNDAY, AUGUST 18, 2013

III. The rationale for being a forgiver.

When Jesus suggested that His disciples give the gift of forgiveness “seventy times seven,” He was thinking of the terrible consequences that would take place in the hearts of the injured if they refuse to forgive. Jesus, with perfect insight into human nature, knew that hate in the heart would be like a cancer in the soul.

- A. We are to give the gift of forgiveness because we have wrote to the Ephesians, ***“let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” [Eph. 4:31-32].***
- B. We need to consider the terrible cost of an unforgiving spirit if we have difficulty giving the gift of forgiveness ***[Matt. 6:14-15].*** Giving the gift of forgiveness is not a price we pay to receive forgiveness. Those who harbor hate and wrath in their hearts have closed the door through which God’s forgiveness would come to them.
- C. We must give the gift of forgiveness in order to prevent Satan from establishing a leach-head in our thoughts ***[2Cor 2:10-11].***

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- D. A forgiving spirit will bring healing to the injured spirit. Many people quiver with pain because they have been mistreated and sinned against. Jesus speaks to these and says we are to forgive “seventy times seven.” This is a strong statement that we need to take literally. Every time we hurt, we need to give the gift of forgiveness again. Some misunderstand at this point. They think they if you do not forget, that you have not forgiven. In reality, it is impossible to totally forget. On the other hand, if we forgive and do it repeatedly, for all practical purposes we will forget to the point of no longer harboring hate or striking out in retaliation.

God’s forgiveness to each of us is free, complete and forever. He doesn’t hold our sins against us; he offers forgiveness to each of us personally. On the basis of his forgiveness, we can be forgiving toward others. If you have been holding a grudge against someone, you can give yourself a clean heart and a clear conscience if you will ask the forgiving God to help you to give to that one who injured you the gift of forgiveness.