

## From Forgiven to Forgiving - Part 1

Kingham & Churchill 16/8/2006

Readings: Ephesians 4:17-32; Luke 17:1-10 and Matthew 18:15-20

### Introduction

The issue of forgiveness raises all sorts of questions for people.

It's never far from the news.

So there's Ronnie Biggs and the convicted Lockerbie bomber.

Should these men be granted early release on compassionate grounds, despite showing no remorse for their crimes?

But for Christians there are a lot of further questions that flow from trying to obey him on this topic.

For example, do I have to forgive someone who asks me to?

And if I don't, will God not forgive me?

Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

OK, but what if they keep on doing it?

And what if the person hasn't asked for my forgiveness?

They might be dead or I've lost all contact with them.

What if they refuse to admit their fault and ask my forgiveness?

Worse still, what if they continue to harm me?

Or flip it over: do I always have to go and ask forgiveness, whenever I wrong someone else?

Or would that be the wrong thing to do sometimes?

These are the kinds of questions I want us to think about.

And they're really important because the relationships between us are crucial to our witness here in our villages.

Jesus' said 'By this all men will know that you're my disciples... if you love one another.' John 13:35

The New Testament works out Jesus' 'love one another' principle in the real world of Christian relationships.

Paul wrote, in our first reading, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." Ephesians 4:32

### What is forgiveness?

Let's start with the obvious question: What is forgiveness?

You might well think, 'That's obvious. Someone wrongs me; he comes and says sorry;

I say that's OK, forget it.'

And you'd be wrong, that's not biblical thinking at all!

Woh! Isn't it?

Ask yourself, is the word 'sorry' or 'apologise' in Scripture?

My computer can search the whole Bible in milliseconds.

'Sorry' only appears twice.

The princess who found the baby Moses in the bull rushes "felt sorry for him."

And Paul wrote "I'm happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance."

So being sorry for your sins may help, but it's not central.

The word 'apologise' does not appear at all!

No, forgiveness isn't an emotion in Scripture: God expects me to forgive not just if I feel sorry for what I've done.

Forgiveness isn't to do with apologising, but with repenting.

A key verse that's helped me on forgiveness is Ephesians 4:32:

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

Now, just by way of passing, did you notice the main reason I should be so willing to forgive you.

It is because God has been so willing to forgive me!

So willing that he sent his son into the world to die that awful death in my place on the cross of Calvary.

'And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Saviour's blood? Died He for me, who caused His pain? For me, who Him to death pursued? Amazing love! How can it be that Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?'

You and I as Christians must forgive each other because, and in the same way that, God forgives us.

So how does God forgive me?

He doesn't just sit in heaven feeling forgiving towards me!

He doesn't keep it to himself, he goes on public record.

God's forgiveness is a process at the end of which he speaks.

What does he say?

He says things like Isaiah 43:25 'I am he who blots out your transgressions... and remembers your sins no more.'

And Jeremiah 31:34 'I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.'

So when God forgives you, what does he do?

He makes a public promise that he can be held to.

And that promise is to remember your sins no more.

God's forgiveness is a promise to remember your sin no more.

That's the very heart of the Bible's teaching on forgiveness.

It's so important, I don't want you to miss this.

God's forgiveness is a promise to remember your sin no more.

Which is not the same as forgetting your sins!

God could not possibly forget anything, like I forgot the bread and wine for the service at Langston last Thursday.

God has perfect knowledge!

Now that is so much better than saying he will forget what I've done, like an absent-minded professor.

'Don't worry, Tony, forget it! I have!'

If he forgets my sin, then he may well remember it later.

'Oh yes, I remember what Tony did! That was terrible. I must have another word with him about that.'

No, he doesn't say he'll forget my sins when I repent, he says he will choose not to not remember my sins.

He's promising never to bring them up ever again, not with me or anyone else or even himself, in his thinking.

And so do you see, he is promising never to use my sins against me to my harm.

Let me remind you of a couple of HUGE verses to help you remember this wonderful, life-changing truth.

Because when I have confessed to God, Satan often whispers in my ear that God hasn't really forgiven me.

Psalms 103:12 "as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."

David didn't know the earth was round - he meant God removes our sins an infinite distance when he forgives us.

Or Micah 7:19 "You will again have compassion on us; you will ... hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea."

Micah didn't know that the Mariana Trench is the deepest part of the ocean, at nearly 7 miles deep!

When God hurls your "iniquities into the depths of the sea", they can't be retrieved!

So what is God's forgiveness in the Bible?

It's a promise never again to raise the matter with you, or anyone else or himself, and so never to use it against you.

Ever!

### **What does this mean to you?**

So what does this mean for upsets between us as Christians?

It means that you and I must forgive one another as God forgives us in Christ, Ephesians chapter 4v32.

So that must mean that when I say 'I forgive you', I'm making a promise never to bring the matter up again, with you, with anyone else, even with myself in my head.

So I'm promising never to use it against you.

And that's hard!

'Oh, you always do this every time we go to my Mother's! Then you say sorry, but you'll do it again!'

Yes it's hard, but it's only forgiving you as God forgave me.

There are two situations we need to be clear on, aren't there?

What happens when someone sins against me, hurts me?

And what happens when I sin against someone else?

We've only got time to look at one of those today.

So let's think about what happens when I'm sinned against.

Luke 17:3 and Jesus says: "watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent', forgive him."

This is radical stuff which you might need to do this coming week, so let's take it slowly.

Jesus starts by saying 'watch yourselves', so whatever he is going to tell us is going to be hard!

In fact, there's a hard thing, and then an even harder thing.

Jesus isn't talking here about when you see another Christian doing something wrong that doesn't involve you.

He says "If he sins against you seven times in a day".

Something very personal and probably painful to me.

That's why Jesus says I'm involved and have to act.

Are you ready for the hard thing?

The hard thing I have to do is to go to the one who has sinned 'against me' and 'rebuke him'.

Oh - my - goodness!

That sounds hard enough, but it's harder still when you realise what I'm not to do:-

I'm not to whine and feel sorry for myself.

I'm not to storm or mope about so everyone knows how hurt I am and asks 'what's up'.

I'm not to go round saying "Now, you know I don't mean to gossip in telling you what so-and-so did. I'm just warning you so that you can protect yourself from him."

No, none of that, says Jesus, deal with it - I'm to go to him and rebuke him.

God wants us reconciled and this sin in the Mariana Trench.

Hold on a minute, you're thinking, shouldn't he come to me?

Why should I have to go to him?

Well, as a matter of fact, yes he should come to me.

In Matthew 5:23f Jesus says: 'Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you [because you've sinned against him], leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.'

Did you notice the 'reconcile' word there?

Whenever a Christian sins against a brother, God's goal is that they be fully reconciled back to a loving relationship.

Well, of course it is, we're to forgive one another as God forgave us in Christ.

That was God's goal in bringing us to faith in Christ and forgiving us in the first place!

That we get back into a loving father/child relationship with him!

So if he has sinned against me, he should come to me.

But the problem is he may not come!

He may not realise he's hurt you.

Perhaps he doesn't know his Bible very well and so doesn't realise he's done wrong.

Or maybe he's just not repentant before God.

Should he come to me? Yes! Matthew chapter 5v23

Should I go to him? Yes again! Luke chapter 17v3.

Ideally, we should meet halfway; Jesus covers both angles!

Now, careful about this 'rebuke' word, as it sounds harsh!

There are two different Greek words for 'rebuke' used in the New Testament.

One is when you're sure you have enough proof.

The other, the one used here, is more tentative.

Go to him and rebuke him tentatively, because I might have got the wrong end of the stick!

But Jesus commands me to raise it with him.

Why?

Because Jesus wants his church to be a family of people reconciled to God and each other.

Showing the world how it ought to be!

I told you it was difficult - Jesus said 'watch yourselves'.

But what's even harder is the next bit - 'rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.'

And do it 7 times a day if necessary, in other words every time he repents!

This is so hard the apostles say to Jesus 'Increase our faith!'

And Jesus, in effect, says, that's a cop out!

You don't need more faith, you just need more obedience!

He tells them of a servant who comes in from a hard day's work and still has to serve his master before himself.

So it doesn't matter if you're tired or you don't feel like going, rebuking, let alone forgiving him if he repents.

As a Christian you and I are servants under orders to our Lord.

I must go and get it dealt with and be reconciled!

If my brother repents, which means he acknowledges he is in the wrong and commits to change, and asks my forgiveness...

If he repents, Jesus says, I must forgive him and make the threefold promise!

'I accept what you say. I will never again bring this matter up with you, anyone else or even in my own thoughts.'

In fact, if I don't forgive him as God forgives me, then I will be sinning against him, and of course against God.

## Conclusion

That's all we have time for today.

In part two, which will be on 6th September, I'll show you the answers from the Bible to the remaining questions.

Questions like:

If the other person won't repent, must I forgive him?

Indeed, can I forgive him?

And in that situation, what does God expect of me?

If I won't forgive, will God forgive me?

Do I really need to go through this whole rebuke, repent forgive process for every little upset?

And what if I'm the offender - what must I do then?

Or if they don't know what I've done, isn't it best to repent before God and not tell them?

And are there some sins so serious that, even after forgiving, reconciliation isn't possible or appropriate?

I'll also suggest some tips on how to keep that threefold promise to forgive.

And I'll give you a handout covering the key points we need to remember regarding forgiveness between us.

But let me close with a reminder of God's model for repairing broken relationships between Christians.

Here it is in its simplest form:

SIN → CONFRONTATION → REPENTANCE & CONFESSION → FORGIVENESS  
→ RECONCILIATION.

One - A Christian sins against another.

Two - they meet, hopefully both of them wanting to meet, in order to confront the matter.

Three - the offender says that he was wrong and will change and not do it again and ask forgiveness.

Four - the other one agrees to forgive, promising never to bring the matter up again.

Five - they are reconciled, back in fellowship and often in a better relationship than before.

SIN → CONFRONTATION → REPENTANCE & CONFESSION → FORGIVENESS  
→ RECONCILIATION.

Let's pray together.