

# FORGIVENESS

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## **Luke 23:33-34**

Here in our text, our Lord is thinking just now about at least some of those cruel and merciless individuals who have beaten him with whips, forced him to carry his cross, driven nails in his hands and feet, hoisted him up between earth and sky to suffer in agony. Now, some of them are obviously standing by as part of their day's assignment to watch Him as He slowly dies, to be there to make sure He does, and to finalize the capital punishment as their law demands. Meanwhile some of them will play a little game of dice, betting on the chance to win His clothes in the game. This poor, disfigured criminal on this cross is of very little concern to them. Just another criminal to do away with, because they had their orders and this was just another day's work.

At the risk of distracting us, I want to look away from the ugly brutality of Calvary for just a minute and say something about what I see among professing Christians. I am struck this morning with the solemn fact that there is a great difference sometimes in the way professing Christians deal with forgiveness. There is a spirit in a lot of people for holding grudges...in other words for practicing a state of heart where they refuse or fail to forgive their brothers or sisters, or maybe a non-believer for trespasses against them. When I think of how our way of thinking and feeling about offenses allows us this luxury and this transgression, I am also struck with how completely opposite such a thing is to Christ's attitude about it.

The bible has some very clear and important lessons for us about forgiveness. The greatest of these I believe can be seen in this very mournful scene at Calvary that we read about in our text. I want us to begin here at Christ's example and use it to spin off elsewhere in bible teaching concerning forgiveness.

## **I. First, looking back again at that day at Calvary: Forgiveness Reaches to The Ignorant**

- ❖ Those folks included in Jesus' request that day were a merciless, thoughtless lot. As they stood around the crosses that day, they had an excuse for their merciless attitudes.
  - "...for they know not what they do."
- ❖ These were objects of special forgiveness from the one they were killing
  - When we think about this absolutely stupendous act of our Savior, we have to also admit that nobody can sincerely ask God to forgive that kind of

- offender, or really any other lesser offender, unless they themselves are already in a spiritual / mental condition to forgive that person themselves
- This extraordinary act of our Lord is made even more enormous by the fact that this forgiveness was not sought by the offenders
  - ❖ While Christ's request for forgiveness actually sprung from a **sovereign prerogative** (his own choice to do it because He was of God), yet He pleaded their case based on their ignorance
    - His example teaches us that ignorance about the nature of a trespass on the part of someone who harms us is enough to command us to also forgive them
  - ❖ This scene at the foot of the cross teaches us something else we need to keep in mind. Natural men do not have any grasp of the seriousness of damaging actions against God's people.
    - Sometimes even saved people have a level of ignorance which causes them to do very offensive things against the Lord, but there is no class of human more ignorant of this than lost people
  - ❖ The judgment of God against such things is severe.
    - We see an example of that judgment in **1Sam. 15:2-3** - God spoke to Samuel to pass a message on to the newly anointed king of Israel (Saul): Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I remember *that* which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid *wait* for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. **Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have**, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.
    - While this is a solemn message from the Lord about offenses against him, yet, we never see this kind of judgment fall on some people: The key to the difference between this incident and the judgment which is withheld for some wicked deeds is found in **2Pet. 3:7** But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

## II. Now Let's Think About an even Larger Picture of Forgiveness: Forgiveness Reaches Beyond the Ignorantly Merciless (Matthew 18:21-22) -

Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? **22** Jesus saith unto him, **I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.**

- ❖ It is important for us to see how emphatic our Lord is about the necessity to forgive men everywhere, but especially our brother, for trespasses.
- ❖ The bible here teaches that this forgiveness is to be repetitive
- ❖ Peter might have been looking for a certain number of times of forgiveness, where he could stop showing long-suffering toward a fellow-believer - he was

undoubtedly thinking of repetitive offenses.

- ❖ 70 X 7 does not mean 490 - 7 in the bible has always been understood to mean a fullness of God, or completeness of God...here Jesus is talking about 70 times a fullness or completeness of God.
- ❖ Now looking in **Luke 17:3-4** notice:
- ❖ Christ's explanation at this time leaves the number of times open ended - seven times in a day, but no number of days. Some might take this to mean on the 8<sup>th</sup> offense from the brother, we can stop forgiving. Not so. This 7 indicates a fullness of God...an infinite number.
- ❖ Now, let's notice also here that Christ puts a condition on forgiving a brother: He says (v. 3) that if a brother trespasses against us, we are to rebuke him and if he repents, we forgive him.
  - This sets the rules for forgiving trespasses (this is when a brother sins against us (we must be able to define the act as a sin against us in order to follow this rule)
  - I mention this in order that we might get a sense of the difference between offenses or trespasses that come from those who are supposed to have knowledge and those that are born of ignorance) – Remember that Christ did not look for a repentance from that ignorant crowd which crucified Him.
  - This teaching of the Lord also lets us know that the brother who offends may be in need of clarification - some folks have trouble being able to tell when they offend other folks ...nothing will let them know about it better than being told.
- ❖ The teaching here also lets us know that an informed brother is expected, as the spirit will surely lead, to repent of the trespass

**III. There is a Consequence In How We Handle Forgiveness: (Matthew 6:14:15) For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: 15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.**

- ❖ See an expansion of this idea in the parable in **Matthew 18:23-35 (especially vv. 34-35)** - The Lord looks narrowly on a double standard about forgiveness among believers
  - The Lord has ordained tormentors for the purpose of refining out an unforgiving spirit in His people (**Mat. 18:34**)
  - The Lord also gives us a great bit of gracious instruction about forgiving one another: **Eph 4:32** And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, **even as God** for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.
- ❖ We mentioned earlier God's charge to Saul about the Amalekites for their offenses against Israel. In closing, we want to emphasize again that there are **always consequences for the offender who stands in need of forgiveness** –

**further, I don't find scripture that nullifies consequences even if the ones they offend actually do forgive them.**

- Why might this be the case? I believe it is because this is protection from the Lord against abuse by people who walk in the Christian community, claiming to be right with the Lord, but instead are users of God's people and prey on their obligation to do the Lord's will in relation to offenses.
  - How many times have you heard nay-sayers say something like this: "If you were a Christian, you wouldn't (or you would) etc. etc." This is a word ploy to make believers feel guilty and do what those people want them to do.
  - See **Luke 17:1-2** (notice that this is the beginning of Jesus' talk on the lesson about forgiveness). Then said he unto the disciples, **It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come! 2 It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.**

### **ALL THESE VERSES SHOW THAT FORGIVENESS IS A CENTRAL THEME IN THE EFFECTS OF GOSPEL SALVATION**

- ❖ **Act 5:31** Him hath God exalted with his right hand *to be* a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.
- ❖ **Act 13:38** Be it known unto you therefore, men *and* brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins:
- ❖ Jesus Christ's words to Paul at his conversion in which He outlined his forthcoming ministry told him that he would be sent: **Act 26:18** To open their eyes, *and* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive **forgiveness of sins**, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.
- ❖ **Eph 1:7** In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;
- ❖ **Col 1:14** In whom we have redemption through his blood, *even* the forgiveness of sins:
- ❖ **Col 2:13** And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;
- ❖ **1John 2:12** I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.