



FEED MY SHEEP

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Issue #218

April 2017

Types of forgiveness

The fruit of forgiveness, part 1

Some time back—in March of 2015—to be exact, I finished the FMS series on the life of Joseph the Overcomer. I omitted a substantial amount of material at the end of that series. But I will use it now because it fits closely with a short series which I commence here.

This new series is another study on one of the fruits of the Spirit. In Paul's epistles, he gives lists of some of the fruits of the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 5:9) The Spiritual fruit which we are here commencing study is the fruit of forgiveness. Although it is not found in those lists of fruits in Paul's epistles, who can argue that *forgiveness* is not a fruit of the Spirit?

It is a pre-eminent quality of good Christian character. It is a virtue without which one cannot be counted in that number of the special class of Christians who will be known as the overcomers. In other words, are you striving to be an overcomer? Then forgiveness must be one of the virtues evident in your character. Let us then explore exactly what forgiveness is *and what it is not*, biblically speaking.

First, I shall delineate several different kinds of forgiveness. Then we will turn our attention to the most important one of those, because ultimately, it will be the only one which really counts...with God, and for your own sake.

In a study such as this, I am sure you understand that all of this material does not come from my little pea-brain. I research and I read and study and see what God has shown others. Then once in a while, your Father provides a new insight to me and all of that gets

put together and simmers a while in my mind, and then gets served up to you.

We can categorize forgiveness into three or four different kinds or levels of forgiveness:

1. There is *conditional* forgiveness.
2. There is *distant* forgiveness.
3. There is *partial* forgiveness.
4. There is what we can call *jubilee* forgiveness.

Let's define them. *Conditional* forgiveness is saying: I will forgive him *if* he convinces me that he is truly sorry for what he did to me. That's a *condition* we are placing on the offender before we will grant that person forgiveness.

Of course, the conditions demanded can be just about anything. A person could demand that they pay them money or give them something else, or make a public confession of how they hurt the one offended. Take out a billboard ad and tell the world. Anytime there are conditions that have to be met before forgiveness is granted, we call that conditional forgiveness.

Now you and I have probably never demanded that anyone rent a billboard to make a public confession and apology to us, but I have been guilty *in my mind* many times of practicing conditional forgiveness. And I dare say, so have you. By the way, do you think conditional forgiveness is pleasing to our Father?

Secondly, there is distant forgiveness. By distant, we are talking about *emotional* distance. In other words,

there might be some degree of feeling less negative about a person, but there is no reconciliation or restoration of a relationship with the one who offended you.

My guess is that we have all experienced both sides of that type of forgiveness as well. There are people in your life who were once quite close to you and then somehow they offended you, or maybe it was a string of offenses and finally you just let them fade out of your life.

Now I am not saying that is necessarily bad, in itself, to let someone who is continually offensive fade out of your life. It depends on a lot of other factors. But I am talking about how we feel about them now. We might have to admit that in our heart, we still shelter some degree of negativity and unforgiveness towards that person.

That might be due to the fact that they have never said they were sorry, and so what we really have is distant forgiveness combined with conditional forgiveness. It doesn't hurt so bad now, because time has gone on, but we know that it certainly has not been a healed situation.

I don't think distant forgiveness cuts it with our Father either, do you? Next is *partial* forgiveness. Here we find that there is a considerable lessening of negative emotions toward the offender. There is a partial restoration of a relationship.

This might happen in a marriage where a spouse has been unfaithful. In many cases like that, partial forgiveness is about as far as it goes. Consequently, the marriage relationship will never have the wonderful vitality and intensity that it once had.

Finally, there is what I call "jubilee forgiveness." It is a *full* forgiveness; a *complete* forgiveness; a *total* forgiveness. It is unconditional forgiveness. This means that there is a complete cessation of negative feelings toward the offender and, *when possible*, the relationship is fully restored.

Those were brief definitions of the various kinds of forgiveness. Before we begin to focus on jubilee forgiveness, let's first look at some Scriptures and see what God commands and expects of His children. In this portion of his epistle to the believers at Ephesus, Paul is exhorting them with these principles for holy

living.

Ephesians 4:29 Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

30 And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

31 Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:

32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

This begs a question, doesn't it? Namely, if we are to forgive one another as God forgave us, then we need to examine how God forgave us. Was it partial forgiveness? Was it conditional forgiveness? We will get to that in time. Now to Colossians 3. Here again, this is a rather lengthy passage where Paul is exhorting the Christians at Colosse to grow in the virtues of Christ. And among them we find another exhortation to forgiveness.

Colossians 3:13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

And just as we found in Ephesians, so here also Paul defines the *type* of forgiveness we are to practice when he added "even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." Let us now look in Matthew 6 to see the direct command of the Savior Himself. This is the famous Lord's prayer passage, and herein Jesus was suggesting how we ought to pray. Part of that prayer is this:

Matthew 6: 12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

14 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.

Keep a marker here and turn to Luke 11. Because in the passage we just read, we saw the words *debts*

and *trespasses* and I am telling you that the meaning is *offences* and *sins*. Technically, if you look at the Greek word for *debts*, that is exactly what it means.

It is the word G3783 **ὀφείλημα** *opheilema* {of-i'-lay-mah}. It is only used twice and both times it is translated as *debts*. The lexicons say it means 1) that which is owed 1a) that which is justly or legally due, a debt...

But then it adds definition number 2) metaphorically, offence, sin. So some Christians might wonder, does this mean then that if, for example, you lend your Christian brother the money for a down payment on a house or a car that you must forgive the debt?

What if it really stretched you financially to help out the brother and you really need to get the money back? Is Jesus saying that we need to always forgive any and all monetary debts?

What if you run a company—you're a sole owner and so you *are* the company. Say you're a home-builder. You build a home for a client who happens to be a Christian. You finish the job and he still owes you \$80,000 on the house.

He is indebted to you. So is Jesus saying that you have to forgive the debt? ...And thereby drive your company into bankruptcy?

Of course not. Something else is obviously going on here. Let's look at Luke 11 where we find another account of the Lord's prayer. Luke's record was divinely inspired to use the word *sins* instead of *debts* or *trespasses*.

Luke 11: 3 Give us day by day our daily bread.

4 And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

Debts, trespasses, sins: those were three different Greek words used, but it is clear they all are referring to someone who offends or sins against us. Let's go back to Matthew 6.

One might wonder then, why is the word for *debt* used at all in this context? And the answer is...to **point us back to the law of jubilee**. The laws of jubilee are spelled out in the book of Leviticus, chapter

25. I did a four-lecture study on that subject many years ago.

I used that study as the kick-off point for our long train of studies which culminated in understanding how and why God will save everybody—universal reconciliation; i.e., universal salvation. But we cannot possibly and truly understand universal reconciliation unless we understand the laws of jubilee.

I will not take the time in this series to give any substantial amount of details about the principle of jubilee, and yet, it is *fundamental* to understanding the type of forgiveness God wants us to practice. Therefore, I would suggest to anyone who has not heard them to obtain my CDs on the Laws of Jubilee. See page 4 for more information.

To summarize those four lectures in a couple of sentences, it is this: Our heavenly Father looks upon all sin as a debt. It is a debt that we cannot *ever* repay. But by the law of jubilee, there comes a time when Father declares a jubilee, which means that every person is unconditionally forgiven and returns to his inheritance.

For those of you who have heard the jubilee series, you might remember how, in the fiftieth year, if a man has not been able to pay back his debt, he is totally forgiven and he goes back to the family farm that he lost in debt.

Now I know that some of you to whom this is new are immediately thinking that this gives carte blanche to sinners to keep on sinning, but I tell you just as forcefully that such is not the case! But as I said, I cannot here get into all the step-by-step, logical progression of teaching of all the principles of jubilee. We already did it. It's available.

Let's read Matthew 6:15 again. Jesus said:

15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Therefore, a second question which may arise in the minds of some of us is that *this sounds a whole lot like salvation by works*. We have to do something in order to be saved—namely, forgive those who sin against us. Again, such is not the case.

Otherwise, this would be in direct and total con-

tradition to many other Scriptures. This is not about your eternal salvation in terms of whether or not you will make it. Instead this has to do with the rewards you may or may not receive.

This has to do with the degree of fellowship you will enjoy with the Father, with Jesus the Son, and with the Holy Spirit. How do we know that? Well, we read it earlier. Listen as I repeat from ...

Ephesians 4: 30 And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

You see, when you become a Christian, the Holy Spirit dwells within you. But even as Christian believers, you and I are not perfected yet, and so when we have bitterness, anger, unforgiveness, etc. ...these things quench or grieve the Holy Spirit and our fellowship with Him is squelched. And so Paul continues that if you don't want to grieve the Spirit, then:

31 Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:

32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Thus, our salvation is a free gift, but our level of rewards in the kingdom is based upon performance. And of course, if we desire to be among the very elect, the overcomers, to participate in the very best "rewards program," then above all, we must become jubilee forgivers.

When that happens—unconditional jubilee forgiveness—then the Holy Spirit is not grieved. The Spirit is then able to dwell more abundantly in our hearts.

We noted earlier that if we are to become more like Christ and learn to forgive as Christ forgave, then we need to search the Scriptures to see how He and the Father forgave. I do not want to split up that ministry, so that is where we shall pick up next issue.

(To be continued)

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***Note:** The Sovereignty of God audio lecture series is also available (in an expanded form) in my book, *Sacred Secrets of the Sovereignty of God*. See flier enclosed with this month's mailing.

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