D.I.Y. Forgiveness

Would it surprise you to know that many people do not know how to forgive?

It is my opinion that too little attention has been given to the matter of forgiveness — in the home, in the church and throughout life in general. It seems that when due consideration is given to this subject, it moves the performance of forgiveness into a mechanical act of one’s own will; therefore, it lacks in sincerity. Additionally, it may seem moved out of our reach when it is taught as a Divine attribute that is nearly unattainable.

Although a “Do It Yourself” kit would be nice to have, and to offer to you, it does not exist. This is a shame because, when it comes to forgiveness, you must, indeed, do it yourself. No one, not even God, can do it for you.

First, we must learn what forgiveness is. It is more, much more, than trying to forget wrongs done to us. Forgiveness is a lifestyle of selflessness that will illuminate the world’s population and guide us to a power greater than ourselves.

This illumination is an integral part of the Gospel that is the power of God unto salvation. Forgiveness, selflessness, and self-denial are the marks of Christianity which should enable us to be lights of the world. It is, unfortunately, difficult and misunderstood. (And, it is much easier to witness to the world with anonymous religious tracts and plastic fish on our car bumpers.)

If we learn what true forgiveness is by the Bible definition, and how to forgive, we can move past the hindrances that the absence of forgiveness in our lives threatens. Threatens? Oh, yes! According to Scripture, the absence of forgiveness — prolific forgiveness — threatens our eternal life! One of the clearest, and least taught, teachings of Christ is on this very subject.

How do the Scriptures describe forgiveness? It is mentioned, or more exactly, exemplified, in a few of the Old Testament books and is found in as much as one-third of the New Testament. We will be dealing with the New Testament references, as they are, by and large, the major part of the instruction given to the Church. Jesus’ famous Sermon on the Mount is BASED, almost entirely, on forgiveness. That is what we find first, so we will start there.

Join me now in learning for ourselves just what forgiveness is. Let’s learn to “Do it Yourself.”
On Forgiveness

The Sermon on the Mount

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

The first mention, found early in Matthew in the Sermon on the Mount, is a synopsis of the principle of forgiveness. Contained in this simple thought are the command, the blessing, and the reward.

The grasp of this principle lends to the hearer the understanding of its reciprocal. To use the language of the Bible, the opposite of “blessing” is “woe”. Therefore, can we not assume this Scripture is saying, “Woe to those who do not have mercy, for they will receive no mercy?” I think it is so and this idea is borne upon other Scripture that we will see later. For now let’s look toward brighter things.

“Ye are all children of light.”

It seems that the more a person practices selflessness the more it is needed. In His sermon, Jesus teaches that we will be persecuted and hated for this “enlightened” righteous behavior. You might ask, “Persecuted... for righteousness?” How can that be? Because, Jesus says, “...ye are not of the world...” and, because “...they know not him that sent me.”

Have you ever wondered about the seeming contradiction of the two statements, “I am the Light of the world,” and “Ye are the light of the world”?

You see, the light that Christ claimed to be, and the light He said we are, is the same light. Carrying the Gospel is bearing this light to the world. These two ideas are coupled in Scripture several ways; one of which is that we are lights lit by Him: John 1:9, “That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” I want to connect for you here the idea that this light of righteousness, selflessness, and forgiveness is the light that is so despised by the world. It is indeed the “light of the glorious Gospel” spoken of in 2 Corinthians 4:4;

“...In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”

When someone teaches that the Gospel is to go into the entire world, you may have visions of a man speaking the Gospel message from his mouth. Whatever success this approach has experienced has only been because the world is always more willing to hear about righteousness than to actually do righteously. The “Gospel” that is preached today is a performer/spectator type and is of little eternal value.

When life takes its inevitable turns and leaves us wondering, “Why?” and all of our understanding is simply not enough, it is too late to find, or purchase that “oil” at midnight.(Ref. Matthew 25) All of the trite sayings and eloquent phraseology will prove to only frustrate those deceived by the words of pretense when sorrows, sickness, death, or terror make their way into their lives.

This verbal “Gospel” has had another negative effect on our lives. It has served as a replacement for the true Gospel. The true glad tidings is that God has loved us through Christ. He has forgiven us and been our Friend instead of our Enemy; He has given us what we do not deserve – mercy. This message is carried in experience and displayed to the world in truth (authenticity), not with platitudes or in verbal power but in truth, actuality, example, and fact.

Our actions cannot be disputed – but, our words most assuredly will be. Our thoughts, philosophies, and maxims are ever being considered in the light of what we do. The two are never equal. We must let our lives preach to the world. In fact, our lives do indeed preach everyday EXACTLY what we believe.

Do you believe that you have been given mercy? Wait, before you answer, consider how you handled that lawsuit. Do you believe you have been forgiven? Wait! Let’s talk to someone who has wronged you, owes you money, treated you badly, cut you off on the highway, treated you as if you are a second class citizen, etc. Do you believe in the grace of God? Do we really understand what has been done for us, what has been erased from our pasts, what punishments forgiven, what undeserved rewards await us who obey Him?

When we start to realize this grace, we will begin to change the way we interact with others. At this point, the light of the gospel will begin to emanate from us and we will begin to draw fire from the enemy. This selfless attitude is infuriating to the world and they will despise us for

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"But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves our servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed: Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh."

After reading this, as if for first time, notice the two concepts of Gospel preaching and persecution – trouble and death and letting Christ’s light shine. Also notice he said “if our gospel be hid.” How does one hide their gospel? Do you have your own gospel? Yes, you do! It is the work of Christ in you – your forgiveness! (More on that later)

So, are we to preach ourselves? No, Paul goes on to say, “...but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants.” Here the servant idea comes back into play. This is how we preach the Gospel. The attitude of servitude is SHOWING what the Lord did for us by forgiving us, cleansing us, giving us respect and mercy we did not deserve; this is “our gospel.” We are not to hide this gospel of ours because if we do, it is hidden from those who are lost.

Remembering the

The “Gospel” Pit

What makes a Believer peculiar? The answer is our willingness to die for no just reason.

Revelation 12:11 states, "And they overcame ... by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death."

Our willingness to suffer unlawful, unreasonable, and undeserved persecution, prosecution, shame, or penalty in this world is an “acting outwardly” of the inward grace and mercy accorded us; that is, that we were NOT punished for what we DID do. Everything that was ever done against the Son of God when in the flesh was unjustified – every curse undeserved, every accusation without foundation, every mocking, cruelly motivated, every slander, unsubstantiated. He never opened His mouth but took it all and absorbed it and returned sweet for bitter, truth for lies, love for hate, loving kindness for bitter cruelty.

The word “saved” has been incorrectly scavenged from the Bible as a descriptive term of our condition as spiritual children of Jehovah. Among many of my objections to this word is that it carries with it an air of superiority, rank, or status. It is as if we have been thrown a life preserver because someone counted us WORTHY of saving. This is so dangerously close to pride I think we dare not touch it. I have heard people say, “If I were the only one on earth that needed salvation, God would have sent Jesus to die for me.” By what authority do they say that? Upon what do they base that belief? I contend that through silly, unscriptural messages and songs and by hearsay we have developed an exclusive club in our mind. A club to which we Christians belong and can take pride in being a member. This comes almost directly from misunderstanding the Bible definition of our state of redemption.

We need to keep in mind two points.

1) The better word that defines the Bible’s word “saved” is “made sound” or brought from a place of unsound (dilapidated, rickety, broken, undone, cursed) condition and “salvaged.”

2) The Scriptures are mistranslated when they imply a completed state of being. According to the Scriptures we are BEING MADE SOUND. The job is not done -- it has only begun.

We have been brought from an unsound state and are being made sound. The word “redeemed” is a perfect word to describe what has happened to us. We HAVE BEEN redeemed; we are BEING salvaged (saved).

As a child, I remember collecting soda pop bottles for spending money. It was this memory I reflected upon when I first read the word “redeemed” in the Bible. The Father used this memory to demon-
Did Jesus pay your “Sin Debt”?

Have you any assurance about your own forgiveness without practicing it in your daily life?

Is it necessary to forget in order to really forgive others?

Have our sins been erased from the Father’s memory?

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strate to me, the point I am making here.

I remember seeing the discarded bottles on the side of the hot, sandy Florida roads upon which I walked, barefooted, as a young boy. Some of the bottles lay half-sunken in mud — one this brand and another that — one this color and another that. I can remember the sucking sound and smell of the hot, black and green muck as it released its treasure to me. Sometimes, I would see a bottle neck rising above the wild grass. Pulling on its neck, from the weeds it would rise slowly to reveal ... its bottom was its neck, from the weeds it would rise rising above the wild grass. Pulling on its neck, from the weeds it would rise. I can remember the smell of the hot, black and green mud — one this brand and another that. Some of the bottles lay half-sunken in the mud — one this brand and another that. I strolled barefooted, as a young boy. I can remember the sucking sound and smell of the hot, black and green muck as it released its treasure to me.

Do you remember the place from which you were salvaged? Do you remember “the pit from whence you were digged”? (Isaiah 51) We must shun the idea that we are in an exclusive club or been given anything because of our own value. We have been given what we do not deserve.

The grace and mercy we have experienced must be transmitted to the world. It is done so easily and simply when we forgive. Our Gospel of forgivingness is simple and easy as long as we remember the “pit.” This is our gospel. This is the testimony. This is the message: “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” John 13:35

**Suffering Wrongfully**

Paul was in full understanding that this toleration and forgivingness was the “dying of the Lord Jesus” that he was to suffer. Paul was a man who exemplifies self-less-ness. There is not of word of blame, not a word of him thinking that he deserved to be treated better; he never spoke platitudes about how he was a “child of the King” and should have a better life. No, this man understood it was his “Gospel” that was drawing the fire, not he himself. He knew how to stop the persecution; he could have done so at any time, but he considered the scars in his flesh “the marks of the Lord Jesus.”

1 Peter 2:19-23, "For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteusly:"

Paul was so mindful of suffering wrongfully that he makes a confession that you or I would probably have passed over completely. When contending with the Jews, he purposefully raised an argument to distract them from their purpose of putting him to trial. Later he confesses that he did, and called it “evil”:

(Acts 24:20-21) "Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council, Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day."

Paul confessed his act as “evil” because it would have made it impossible to suffer wrongfully. If there is a reason for blame, then we cannot suffer wrongfully. If we are to forgive, we must make sure that when we do suffer it is for NO LEGITI-
Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

The message here is clear. So clear in fact, it is pure deception to modify its meaning.

We have been given the idea that we are forgiven simply because we have asked for forgiveness, but the idea in Jesus’ words here is that forgiveness for ourselves comes AS we forgive others.

The Lord’s prayer model contains this idea: (Matthew 6:12) "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." and Luke’s account is even more narrow: "And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us." Luke 11:4

Let’s look at some dangerous, but common, ideas about forgiveness.

I may forgive -- but, I'll not forget.

You may have been counseled that you have not forgiven if you have not forgotten. I contend that it is unfair to arbitrarily bind forgetting to forgiving thereby rendering it an impossible task.

A thinking person who considers and weighs relationships and situations will find this “need to forget in order to forgive” most detrimental. Some come to believe it is impossible to forget and therefore give up on forgiveness altogether. I think somewhere in the middle is the balance we are seeking.

I refer to myself as a good example of forgetfulness. I have forgotten more wrongs done to me than you can imagine. I am not boasting that I am a great forgiver full of mercy and kindness. No, on the contrary, I can remember when these wrongs, brought to my attention or remembered, would make me keenly aware that I had not forgiven the person at all! Before I learned to forgive, I could feel resentment well up, and if I dwelled on it long enough, I was as hurt as the day it happened. So, did I forget because I had forgiven? No, I just stupidly forgot that they did me wrong!

We can see by my example that forgetting does not produce forgiveness, and I think we can all attest that forgiving does not prompt forgetting.

Is it necessary to forget in order to really forgive?

Look at the story above. Did the King erase the debt? Did he forget? No, he forgave the debt. He knew EXACTLY how much the man owed him and he had mercy on him. When this same man was found not showing mercy, the debt of which he had previously been forgiven was REMEMBERED, REINSTATED and he was made to pay it.

If we are to think, as the Lord intended, that this story depicts just how the Great Judge will handle our forgiveness, how can we inject forgetfulness into this scenario? Nothing was forgotten except the mercy shown to the servant. The man’s original debt was most certainly remembered.

Forgiveness is a wonderful thing. It is not an erasure or spot removal or magic. Forgiveness occurs when God, fully aware of our shortcomings, through the mercy afforded us through Christ, decides to treat us as if we had not sinned. He decides to disregard the sins of which He is fully aware. He does not forget our sins, He forgives them.

What about the “Sea of Forgetfulness” the place where He puts our sins? Sorry, that’s just preachin’ – it not Scripture.

Micah 7:19 says, "... thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." and in Psalms 139:7, "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?"

You see, the God of all the earth is not separated from our sins that He has placed in the sea, but we are. He puts them there so WE can’t
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Psalms 103:12 bears this out as well, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us."

The key words in this verse are "from us."

The book of Hebrews teaches that we "should have had no more conscience of sins." It is up to us to maintain balance.

What about being forgiven are we to remember — and what about our sins are we to forget? We should follow our Father’s example in forgiveness. We are to encourage those we forgive to forget the transgression. To allow them to feel sorrow or remorse for that which you have forgiven is wrong.

For us to forget when someone sins against us is not only improbable it is foolish. Why should we subject ourselves by ignoring information brought to light by discovery? To act as though a person is no threat when one sins against us is not only improbable, it is foolish. Why should we subject ourselves by ignoring information brought to light by discovery? To act as though a person is no threat when one sins against us is not only improbable, it is foolish.

Are we to wait for those who wrong us to ask us for forgiveness?

This is not a story of sorrow on the part of debtors. Did this man who owed the $50 come to his benefactor and ask to be released? No, the wicked servant “went out and found [him] that owed.” Neither of these men went to the one they owed. They were called to account.

We should not wait for sorrow or remorse on behalf of our debtors; we should look for the opportunity to forgive. Did any one of those spectators or executioners cry out to Christ on the cross for forgiveness? Yet He forgave them and asked YHVH to do likewise. Did any of the ones stoning Stephen ask for forgiveness? Yet, Stephen said to the Father, in his last words, "...lay not this sin to their charge.” We are to be quick to forgive.

The reason we forgive, and the manner or way to forgive, are closely tied. It seems that the more we learn about the “why” the clearer the “how” becomes.

Forgiveness, in short, is duty. In finer terms, forgiveness is an act of the will, motivated by love, in response to a command. If it is solely an act of will, it is mechanical and unfeeling. If it is solely a response to a command, though selfless, it is unintentional. Therefore, the key motivation must be LOVE.

We must have love for those in transgression and love for those giving the command. Perfectly, forgiveness occurs when we love. Jesus said, (Mark 11:25) "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

This command was given just after one of the greatest promises of power was given in the New Testament. We could easily draw from this command a “condition.” It is as if neglect of one could hinder the other.

Do you hear the word, “So” at the beginning of the verse? “So that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.” This may or may not be true, though I believe it is, I cannot speak by authority. Undeniably, however, the command remains clear. “When we stand praying, forgive, if ye have anything against anyone.” This is forgiveness on our part. This is also an example of forgiveness not said to the person in transgression.

How many times have we seen the situation where one person delights in their “superiority” over another by “forgiving” them? To look at a person who is not aware, or does not care that you are offended and say, “I forgive you,” only escalates the situation you hypocritically purport to rectify. When this is done in a religious frame, it is even worse and is no witness for Christ.

We must be careful that we do not use the command to forgive to gain an advantage. However humble it may sound, it is still petty and self-serving and these words should not have to be written or said. We know within ourselves when we do this and it should stop there. When you stand praying, forgive.

Jesus mentioned another instance of forgiveness that is often neglected, that is our need of forgiveness by our brethren in Christ. We are to seek this, as it becomes known and necessary, "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." Matthew 5:23-24

Notice the phrase, “and there rememberest.” I have experienced the Father supernaturally focusing my attention toward my fellow man during my prayers and my offerings. You will, too — if you listen! He is showing that the acceptance of our offerings are hindered as long as we are in need of forgiveness from a brother. As we examine our lives and as these flaws appear we should give earnest attention to them and make them right.

What if they won’t forgive us? Thankfully, Jesus did not leave this to our discretion either. He said

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"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, and tell him his fault to thee and to him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."

Jesus taught that this is a matter not to be left alone. Action is to be taken to gain your brother. If that is impossible, he is not to be counted as a brother to you.

Notice He said, "...unto thee." He is not a heathen to God or the Church – just you. And He said, "AS a heathen man." He did not say he was indeed a heathen, just that you were no longer obligated to gain his acceptance. Unity and peace are of utmost importance in order to live in blessing.

We are to forgive as if our life and happiness mean nothing. Ephesians 4:32, "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, EVEN AS God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

We are to forgive AS we have been forgiven and in turn we are forgiven AS we forgive others.

The New Testament is replete with testimonies of men suffering for Christ's sake. To suffer for His sake is to suffer needlessly, unjust, and undeserved punishment, mockery, slightings, disrespect, and reproach. Today, we tolerate none of these, rather, we carry a torch for the execution of our enemies outside our camp and a vicious tongue for those within.

Why do we take one another to court? Do we not know our clear command? This is not my question, but Paul asked it centuries ago,

"Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law? ... But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers...Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?" 1 Corinthians 6:1-8

Why do ye not suffer (let) yourselves be defrauded? This concept is a new one to the age (and country) in which we live. We feel we should suffer nothing, lose nothing, and sue those who try to take anything from us (whether by accident or intent.)

If Christ is our example – we are dead wrong in this. Have we forgotten Matthew 5:44,

"But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you..."

Summary

Forgiveness is self-less-ness. It is a natural outgrowth of a meek and humble spirit that is fully aware of the debt owed and that cannot be paid.

In the story of the wicked servant cited at first, one thing that stands out is the similarity in the two debt resolutions. The servant that owed the 10,000 talents or $50 million debt resolutions. The servant that owed the 10,000 talents or $50 million (if silver) said, "Have patience with me and I will pay thee all." Then the man who owed 100 pence or about $50 said, "Have patience with me and I will pay thee all."

They spoke the very same words. These words eventually condemned the wicked servant because the two situations were equated and thereby exposed his ingratitude for the mercy shown to him.

However, let's look at the foolishness of the promise, "I will pay thee all." There is only one promise more void of hope than the promise of a bankrupt sharecropper to pay a $50 million debt — the promise of man-

kind to pay the sin debt we owe to our Creator God. That debt, our debt, will NEVER be paid. Some claim that it has been paid by Christ but that claim has no Scriptural foundation.

Our sin debt will never... ever, be paid. Because it cannot be paid.

Forgive, Even As God...

What has the fact that our sin debt remains unpaid have to do with forgiveness? It exposes our perverse "quid pro quo" view of God's mercy. Holding such a view also hinders our forgiveness of our fellow man. We feel that a debt must be paid before we can forgive and assume that our Father God feels the same way. We are wrong!

We think payment precedes and facilitates God’s mercy. We are wrong.!

We place great value on payment. So, in turn, we look for remorse, or sorrow, or restitution, or repentance, or some realization on the part of our debtors before we can forgive them. We look for remorse and repentance — not for our debtor’s benefit as God does, but as some sort of perverted “payment” for the misery they cost us.

We want some expense or at least some discomfort on the part of our “debtors”, even if it is nothing more than their humiliation.

Our idea of forgiveness is corrupted.¹ We only assume that God demanded payment of some kind be made because it makes sense to our fallen nature that He would. We even assume He was so demanding that He extracted this sin payment from His own Son. Yet, what we all must realize is that the debt is not, was not, and will never be paid... ever! God will forgive the debt. It was forever unpaid, forever in arrears, forever owed, yet forgiven.

Jesus did not pay the sin debt. The song notwithstanding, Jesus did not “pay it all.” If you look through the Scriptures you will not
find this now popular doctrinal idea anywhere written in Scriptures. You will search in vain to find a record of this “sin purchase” in the Bible. The purchase that was made, the “price” mentioned throughout the Bible, was the price He paid – FOR YOU! He bought YOU – not your sin. He paid the ransom on your soul.

The unending love that empowers such forgiveness is beyond our comprehension. Christ needed not wait to see if His persecutors would repent; but He implored His Father to forgive them, insisting that they were acting in ignorance.

In His boundless mercy, His Father can stare at the transgression of His Law carved in stone every morning and forgive it every night. He need not forget the debt nor need He find payment before He forgives. He can stare at the unbalanced books, with our debt of rebellion, sin and idolatry, still blatant and glaring, and yet forgive us.

YHVH and His Son are our examples. We have been shown the kind of forgiveness that need not forget the debt to forgive it. By their example, we know that love needs no pre-payment be made in order to engage forgiveness.

Remember, Ephesians 4:32, "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

The message of “Think Red Ink” is simply that Christ has come to teach His people Himself and needs little assistance from the clergy or teachers to do so. We do not intend to teach beyond the universal calling to learn of Christ Himself through His Spirit. We believe that Christ is alive and living within all who honestly acknowledge and follow His leading in all good conscience. There are not many shepherds, but One. There are not many teachers, but One. "Think Red Ink” intends to only publish the true Word of God and His Message.