

LESSON 12:

FORGIVE ONE ANOTHER

Although the relationships between those in God's family are designed to be positive and encouraging, they are also disappointing at times. Brothers and sisters in Christ do not always conduct themselves appropriately toward one another or God. Love demands that sin be addressed due to concern for the individual's soul (Matthew 18:15-20; Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20). Then, when the brother or sister repents, God expects His family to forgive.

EPHESIANS 4:31-32

God expects His people to put off immoral character and put on righteous character formed in the likeness of God. This even applies to how you treat those who have mistreated you. All bitterness, anger, wrath, slander, and malice must be removed from you, including when a brother/sister has personally sinned against you and/or turned away from following Christ and His family. The proper response is never one that comes from hatred, bitterness, or personal vengeance. Instead, you must have deep sympathy for the one making such evil choices and stand ready and willing to forgive the offense(s). Consider that the standard used for your forgiveness is the same as how God forgives you in Christ. No matter what you had done against God, He sent His Son to die for you (Romans 5:6-11) and stood ready and willing to forgive you (2 Peter 3:9). When you turned to Him and sought reconciliation, He forgave. So you also must stand ready and willing to forgive any brother or sister who repents and seeks reconciliation!

MATTHEW 18:21-35

This passage follows instructions about how you should correct a brother or sister who sins against you (Matthew 18:15-20). In response, Peter asked how often forgiveness should be extended to another. He evidently thought he was being

generous by suggesting forgiveness be shown up to seven times (the Jews traditionally suggested three times). However, Jesus's reply must be understood as breaking all artificial limits on forgiveness and indicating that unlimited forgiveness must be shown by those who desire to receive forgiveness from God. This is demonstrated parabolically by teaching that God has completely wiped away the unpayable spiritual debt of sin you had accrued with Him (10,000 talents would potentially be equivalent to about 164,000+ years' wages). Yet, He has forgiven you by entirely wiping it away so that none of it is held against you any longer (Hebrews 8:12; Acts 3:19). It is the height of arrogance to expect God to forgive you of such unpayable debt accrued against Him and not extend mercy and forgiveness to those who sin against you in significantly smaller ways (pictured as 100 days' wages) and seek your forgiveness! Then, God will not forgive you (Matthew 6:14-15)!

LUKE 15:11-32

Forgiving how God forgives requires you to eliminate all self-righteousness from your heart. For example, the older son in this parable (who had not left the father) was not joyful to receive his brother back because he became jealous over how his brother was being celebrated for returning. Although none of us have remained with God our entire lives (Romans 3:23), it is possible to forget about the great mercy we needed from God and think of ourselves in self-righteous ways. However, when you become self-righteous, you look down on others whenever they sin and fail to extend the mercy and grace God expects you to show (Luke 18:9-14). You can begin to think and act like you deserve God's favor and will never let someone back into your favor unless and until he/she has done enough to earn it. Yet, this entirely misses the point of mercy and grace!

1 PETER 4:8

Love in God's family does not guarantee that everyone will always conduct themselves in the ways they should. There will be sins and failures

within God's family. Love, however, does not keep a record of wrongs that have been committed to be used as reminders against another (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). Love stands open to and desires to be reconciled with those who are in sin. For, love does not just work when it is easy, but also when it is difficult (James 5:19-20)! In this case, love will cover the multitude of sins that may have been committed against you so that you no longer see the offending brother/sister as still being guilty after he/she has repented! A good example can be seen in how members of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-28) and Philip (Acts 21:8) received Paul after he gave his life to Christ, despite the way he had persecuted them and those they loved previously (Acts 8:1-4; 9:1-2; 22:3-5; 26:9-11).

LUKE 17:1-4

Every Christian must be diligent not to cause others to fall into sin. However, sin will inevitably happen, even within God's family. Yet, you must not be unwilling to forgive those who repent. In fact, a failure to forgive one who repents can even discourage and cause someone to turn away from God further. Although this can be a great challenge in matters that involve personal hurt, God gives you the responsibility to be concerned for your brother/sister's soul. This involves rebuking the one in sin and forgiving the one who repents (using the standard of how God forgives). Such limitless forgiveness must be offered to the point of even showing it seven times to the same person in the same day (though Jesus is not talking about instances of fake/insincere repentance, as demonstrated over time)!

CONCLUSION

God's family must work to help each other get to Heaven. This even extends to situations when brothers and sisters hurt each other and those they love. Every member of God's family must remember the way they have been dependent on God's mercy and grace shown to them. Now, this same mercy and grace must be shown to those who repent and seek reconciliation with you so that you will once again pursue the Heavenly home together in unity!

DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

How must you avoid treating people who have sinned against you and/or turned away from Christ and His family?

What standard must you use in how you forgive another?

How often must you forgive another?

How does God view those who will not forgive others?

What happens when you view yourself in a self-righteous way?

How should love cause you to view past offenses?

How will love cover a multitude of sins?

How can failing to forgive another negatively impact him/her spiritually?

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