

The Bulletin

Meeks St. Church of Christ

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August 20, 2017

The Great Challenge to Forgive

by Brian Meade

There several aspects of the Christian life that can be especially hard to fulfill at times. These are great challenges to our faith. They are so a challenge because the world we live in makes it that way. We see people all around us who demonstrate an unforgiving spirit when provoked or offended.

Movies like “*Unforgiven*” and “*Payback*” send the wrong message that there are some offenses you just can’t forgive! And that instead of forgiving our enemies and doing good to them, we should rather maliciously do them harm! But God’s word teaches us a better way. The Bible says in Romans 12:17-21, “*Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men.*”¹⁸ *If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.*”¹⁹ *Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.*”²⁰ “*BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.*”²¹ *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*” These words are not just good suggestions, but the loving and forgiving way of life for the Christian!

The Greek word that means to forgive is *aphiemi*. Vine’s Expository dictionary defines it as, “*To send forth, send away, to remit or forgive debts or sins.*” And that is exactly what we do in forgiveness; we send it away and remit the debt so that the person (or persons) who have wronged us doesn’t have that held over them as an issue any longer. As the old saying goes, “*We forgive and forget.*” Let’s look at several points about forgiving others.....

(1) Forgiveness is a Choice.

Whenever we are called upon to forgive someone, we realize that the decision to do so is entirely up to us. Because God has given us freewill to make our own choices and decisions in this life, and we know it is possible for even Christians to make the wrong decision about forgiving someone. To forgive someone is what the Bible teaches us to do (Luke 17:3-4) and it is the only right thing to do. An unforgiving spirit that is filled with hard feelings is never how we should respond to others. It is not loving behavior, but shows ugliness and unkindness in our choice NOT to forgive someone. Jesus’ choice to forgive those who were crucifying Him (Luke 23:34), shows us how we can choose to forgive even the greatest of offenses we may receive. Stephen made the same choice in Acts 7:54-60.

(2) Forgiveness can be Hard.

The main reason why forgiveness can be very hard to extend is the offense or wrong that has occurred. Getting past the offense is a major obstacle to true heartfelt forgiveness. We may feel like the level of severity of what happened is just too great to allow us to forgive someone. We may hear things said like, “*I will never, ever forgive them for what they did to me!*” Or “*He just went too far this time for me to forgive him!*” Even Christians can fall into the trap of setting limits on what we will forgive or not forgive (Matthew 18:21-22).

It is also hard because of the part our emotions play in the offense we have suffered. Feelings of anger, resentment, bitterness, pain of loss, or sadness can all the more cloud our judgment concerning forgiveness. We may even feel a sense of justification in not forgiving some by saying, “*Why should I swallow my pride and forgive them? They did this to me!*”

The Devil will try to tempt us very subtly or even very loudly to focus on the offense and never, ever let it go. But as long as we keep going backward and not forward, we will never be able to forgive someone. The Bible teaches us to forgive and let things go in Proverbs 17:9, ‘*He who covers a transgression seeks love, But he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends*’.

The next time we are tempted to say we can never forgive someone because of what they have done, we need to read the story of Joseph in Genesis chapters 37-50. Joseph’s own brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt. There, he later was thrown into prison for a crime he didn’t commit. He stayed in prison until the butler of Pharaoh finally remembered him and released him. He could have harbored resentment and bitterness for what his brothers did, but he chose not to. Through tears and sorrow for the evil he endured, he let it go and was reunited with his family. It was hard, but forgiveness is worth it!

(3) Forgiveness is a Must!

In Matthew 18:23-35, Jesus gives us a very powerful lesson on why we should forgive others. In the parable there is a servant who was forgiven an enormous debt that he could never have paid! He received forgiveness from that debt by the king, but later failed to show forgiveness to a fellow servant who owed him a lesser debt. It was reported to the king that he had showed so little forgiveness to someone else that it infuriated the King. We read in verses 32-35, “*Then summoning him, his lord *said to him, ‘You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.³³ Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?’³⁴ And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him.³⁵ My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.*”

Showing forgiveness to others is NOT an option if we want God’s forgiveness with our sins! God’s forgiveness was extended to us freely, richly, and without regard to the amount of debt that we owed, but could not pay! There is such a wonderful and awesome feeling that the obedience to the gospel brings to our lives (Romans 6:17-18; Acts 8:30-39). We become like the servant of Jesus’ parable when we show such un-forgiveness to others. We need to remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:14-15, “For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.¹⁵ But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.”

(4) Forgiveness is Freeing.

Going back to the definition of what it means to forgive, it means that I, “*send forth, send away, to remit or forgive debts or sins.*” (Vines Expository Dictionary)

When I truly forgive from the heart— that is when I can truly be free from all the negative feelings of being hurt, bitterness, anger, resentment, and holding grudges..... That is the decision that we have to make to be free from the heavy burden of carrying all the weight of un-forgiveness. We can let go of all of that and clear our heart of malice and ill-will toward someone that should not be there in our heart in the first place (Ephesians 4:31-32).



Meeks Street Church

of Christ

With Billy Randolph

October 15th – 20th

7:00 P.M. Nightly

News and Notes: sick and recovering: Tim Harris Sr., Tim Harris Jr., Chad Harris, Betty Hurst, Luanne Parrish, Janis Johnson, Steve Switcher, Joe & Tommie Nell Roberts, Delain Doles, Barbara Doles, Crate Meade, Kerrie Anne Barnett, Judy King, Billy Mac Fredrick, Gail Armstrong, Nicky Curtis.

Those Who Serve

Sunday Morning 9:00 A.M. Service:

Opening Prayer: Tim Harris Sr.
Preaching: Brian Meade
Sermon: "The Use and Abuse of Religious Titles"

Auditorium Bible Class: 9:35am

Sunday Morning 10:30 A.M. Service: Paul Johnson

Announcements: Russell Briggs

Lord's Table: Paul Johnson
Assisting: Adam Harris & Russell Briggs

Opening Prayer & Scripture Reading: Tim Harris Jr.
Revelation 2:8-13

Song Leader: Jerry Kennemur
Preaching: Brian Meade
Sermon: "What It Means to be Faithful"

Closing Prayer: Fred Johnson

Wednesday Evening: 7:00 P.M.

August 23rd

Auditorium Bible Class: Russell Briggs
Invitation: Paul Busby
Song Leader: Russell Briggs
Closing Prayer: Brian Meade