

Title: FORGIVENESS FROM THE HEART, MATTHEW 18:21-35  
(Chatham, NJ; 09/18/11, AM) [Pc – Problem, Solution, Program]

Theme: If we can assume the problem of humanity is conflict because of offences, Jesus provides the solution in forgiveness.

Purpose: To demonstrate the solution of forgiveness and the “program” by which we carry it out.

Introduction:

1. Forgiveness does not condone bad behavior or permissiveness; it takes the violators, the violated, and the violation seriously.
2. As noted in last week’s lesson, the offence must be made clear both to the sinner and to the sinned against.
3. Repentance is important in the process, Luke 17:4.
4. There can be no forgiveness without standards and values being violated.
5. In the long run it is forgiveness that sustains the Christian community, Eph. 4:32, and that ideal has been illustrated in the Gospel in which God forgives us.
6. We also see this problem of offences as the human problem; Jesus gives the solution and a program of sorts to deal with it.

I. The Problem: human conflict, injustice, offences, sin

A. Reversing Revenge

1. A twist on the number 7 (Peter’s suggested number) - Gen. 4:24 (Explain: Jesus reverses the revenge motif by replacing forgiveness with the same number)
2. In some Hebrew theology the fourth time was punishment, Amos 1: 3, 6, 9, etc.
3. Peter seems to have upped the number to seven, perhaps out of his own desire to do right.
4. Yet his perception here hits on the dominant issue: forgiveness and mercy
5. Homer’s Achilles is motivated by revenge, and heroes in today’s stories are also motivated by it; we even approve when they get it.

B. A different kind of heroism

1. A confrontation with sin should lead to repentance and forgiveness.
2. We must forgive others.
3. But the best news here is that God’s forgiveness is also infinite.
4. His “steadfast love” in Ps. 118 is defined by his mercy and by the promise of a “Day of salvation” in 118:22-24.
5. Jesus’ number demonstrates the infinite mercy of God.

II. Solution

- Forgive as God has forgiven, Eph. 4:32
- Demanded by Matthew 6:14-15
- God forgives and is merciful, Mt. 5:7
- As far as it depends on you, Romans 12:18
- Leave room for God to take vengeance, Rom. 12:19-21
- Overcome evil with good

III. The program

A. The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

1. A debt cancelled out of pity, 27
2. A debt demanded because of lack of pity, 30
3. An expectation of like behavior, 33 – 35

B. Forgiveness from the heart

1. 1 Peter 3:8 mentions some of the attitudes that foster forgiveness from the heart
2. He follows it up with the prohibition against revenge implied in Jesus' parable and stated in Romans 12 as already noted.
3. Furthermore he counsels his audience to seek and pursue peace, 11
4. Implementing these readies us to forgive.

C. Put on the character and the love of God

1. Col. 3:12-13, "forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you"
2. A steadfast and devoted prayer life will foster this, Col. 4:2.
3. The closer you get to God, the more able you are to imitate his character.
4. That demands the discipline of daily prayer and devotion.

Conclusion:

1. The *problem* of sin and human conflict is *solved* by forgiveness and a *disciplined effort* (program) to imitate God's forgiveness.
2. Turn your heart away from revenge; seek to forgive instead.
3. Receiving forgiveness demands repentance, a turning away from sin, perhaps more importantly a turning away from revenge and hardness of heart.
4. We must do this in order to receive the Gospel.
5. Only when we receive it humbly can we reflect it from the heart.
6. Receive it today!