

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, February 8, 2012 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

DANGEROUS FELLOWSHIP “Confession and Forgiveness”

James 5:16, Matthew 5:23-24, Matthew 18:21-35

If we are to enjoy genuine, New Testament fellowship or “koinonia”, and if we are going to be kept close together in agape love, a vital link in the chain will not only be willingness, but also the practice of two essential activities: (1) The confession of wrong on the part of the offender, and (2) The full and unrestrained forgiveness on the part of the offended.

I. EXPLANATION

Two passages from Jesus’ teachings address the same basic issue, but from two different perspectives. These thoughts have reference not to confession and forgiveness as they relate to God, but as they relate to our earthly, horizontal contacts with others. Let’s personalize each situation. On the vertical side, forgiveness flows only from God to man. Horizontally, forgiveness should occur between man and man. On this level we see ourselves in two positions regarding forgiveness: (1) as the offender... the one needing to be forgiven, and (2) as the offended... the one wronged. We will look at a couple of passages that address our responsibility in a very practical way as both the one seeking forgiveness from another and as the one needing to forgive another for a trespass against us.

1. **When We Are the Offender (Matthew 5:23-24)** – The text from Jesus’ well-known Sermon on the Mount succinctly gives the procedure we should follow when we have offended another person. It reads, *“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother (or sister) has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother (or sister); then come and offer your gift.”*

- (1) **The situation** – You have offended someone and have subsequently gone off to worship God, but the matter has never been cleared up (v.23). God is displeased with this arrangement.
- (2) **The procedure** – You, the offender, are to initiate movement toward reconciliation (v.24). **NOTE: The New Testament term to reconcile means “to go through the process of bringing about a change.”** The procedure Jesus offers here is clear. It has four steps:

Step 1: STOP – Under the Mosaic Law, a worshiper brought animals as a sacrifice to be slain on an altar before God. This act provided him or her with cleansing of sin and a way of open access to God. With the sacrificial death of Christ, however, the payment for sins has been made once for all. Now Christians can come to the Lord in prayer without bringing any other sacrifice for their sins. Jesus' point is that when we come to our Father in worship and suddenly remember that we have offended another person, then we are to stop worshiping. We have other business we must attend to first.

Step 2: GO – The second step is to seek out that person we have wronged.

Step 3: RECONCILE – When we find the person we have hurt, we need to be reconciled to him or her. That is, we who offend are commanded to initiate a process that will result in a positive change in the relationship between ourselves and the one we have wounded. This requires that we confess the wrong, express our grief over it, and seek their forgiveness.

Step 4: RETURN – When the first three steps have been accomplished, we are then free to return to God in worship.

- (3) **The consequence** – All confession without attempted reconciliation will fail to relieve feeling of guilt (v.24).

4 Common Questions When Seeking Another's Forgiveness:

1. **“What if he or she refuses to forgive me?”** – If this occurs, recall these words of wisdom from Proverbs 16:7, *“When a man's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.”* You're responsible to do what is right in a humble, loving way. You are not responsible for their reaction or response to your efforts to seek their forgiveness. You are only responsible to try. It may take time, but God will honor your efforts.
2. **“What if the situation only gets worst?”** – The person you have offended may have built up a great deal of bitterness toward you. So when you go to them and try to make amends, you may discover their bitterness as well as expose their guilt. This can easily lead to worse feelings and an even less favorable situation. Don't judge the situation or the person, just realize the depth of hurt and the effects it can have on a person's life. Once again remember that you are not responsible for the other person's response or reaction to your efforts to seek forgiveness. Don't allow this possibility to deter you from seeking reconciliation. God can work in a circumstance like this. However, many times it does take longer for the healing process to occur. So go and perhaps be prepared for the worst, but don't fail to go?
3. **“What if I confess my offense to God only?”** – Then you would be contradicting Jesus' command to go first to the person you offended, then second to the source of forgiveness, our gracious Lord. If you want God to forgive you of your sin against another person, then you must first go to the

person and attempt to make things right between yourselves. Nothing else will do?

4. **“What if I can’t seek forgiveness because the person I offended died before I could seek reconciliation?”** – Since you can’t contact a dead person, find another individual whom you can trust and honestly tell them about your offense against the now deceased person. Then pray with this confidant for the forgiveness you need from the our all-good Lord.

HOW TO ASK FOR FORGIVENESS

9 Things To Do When Asking For Forgiveness:

1. **Think about what happened and what it is you are sorry for doing.**
2. **Write down your apology; this will help you organize your thoughts and calm your nerves.**
3. **Practice what you plan to say until you feel comfortable with it.**
4. **State clearly what it is you are sorry for doing.**
5. **Acknowledge your actions without making excuses.**
6. **Share your feelings about what happened - avoid blaming, exaggerating or saying empty words.**
7. **Listen to the other person's response without getting defensive.**
8. **Offer to make amends if appropriate.**
9. **Move on. Once you've apologized, let it go.**

Some Tips & Warnings

- **Think of an apology as a commitment to the relationship rather than an act of weakness.**
- **Be honest. Only apologize for things you truly feel responsible for; don't apologize just to make an unpleasant situation go away.**
- **Say it in writing if a personal confrontation is just way too scary. Remember that apologizing in person is always the best and number one way to deal with seeking another’s forgiveness.**
- **Give the other person some time to sort out his or her feelings - don't be discouraged if you aren't completely forgiven the moment you apologize**

2. **When we are the Offended (Matthew 18:21-35)** – *“The Peter came to Jesus and asked, ‘Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?’ Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. The servant fell on his knees before him. Be patient with me, he begged, and I will pay back everything. The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. Pay back what you owe me, he demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, be patient with me, and I will pay you back. But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. Then the master called the servant in. You wicked servant, he said, I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you. In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”* Just as there will be times when we have hurt someone else, so there will be occasions when someone will wrong us. In this section of Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus instructs us regarding our responsibility when we are the offended... wronged.

- (1) **The situation** – This time, you have been offended, hurt, or in some way mistreated, and you still entertain feelings against that person who offended you. One of the disciples, Peter, came to Jesus and asked Him if he should forgive sevenfold a person who sinned against him. Jesus answered Peter, *“I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.”* In other words, when we are wronged, we’re to forgive our offender as unlimited number to times. Just as God’s forgiveness toward us has no boundaries, so should our forgiveness of each other be boundless.
- (2) **The procedure** – You, the injured/offended, are to have mercy on the one who has done you wrong, and are to forgive him or her... regardless (vv.22-34). Jesus graphically portrayed His teaching through the parable revealed in these verses. He spoke of a wealthy king “who wished to settle accounts with his slaves” (v.23b). One of his slaves owed him ten thousand talents. Since a talent was probably worth a measure of gold between fifty-eight and eighty pounds, we can see that the slave was indebted to the king for several million dollars. But because the slave could not repay the debt, the king commanded that he and his wife, children, and possessions all be sold in order to recover as much of the debt as possible. The slave humbled himself before the king and begged to be granted more time to repay the money owed. The slave’s entreaty moved the king to compassion, so he

released him and “forgave the debt” (v.27). Later, however, the same slave encountered a second slave who owed him one hundred denarii, which is about sixteen to twenty dollars in today’s currency and in Jesus’ day equaled an average day’s wages. This slave was also unable to repay his debt and begged for more time to come up with the deficit funds. But the slave who had been forgiven of such a huge debt refused to forgive this fellow slave for his much smaller one. Indeed, he threw the second slave in jail “until he should pay back what was owed” (v.30). When the king learned what had transpired, he summoned his slave, rebuked him, and gave him over to the torturers.

- (3) **The consequence** – Refusal to forgive will result in misery – inner torture and torment (vv.34-35). Negatively speaking, our failure to be genuinely merciful toward others will result in God allowing our own bitterness and resentment to poison us inside. However, since very negative presupposes a positive, when we do completely forgive those who wrong us, God will free us from our feelings of torment, misery, and unrest. The choice is ours *.NOTE: Torturers (v.34) were those who “examined by torture, torment, or distress.” God causes us to experience inner anguish until we forgive. This may take the form of depression, resentment, lack of stable inner peace, irritation, impatience, inability to love, bitterness, etc.*

2 Good Reasons We Should Forgive:

1. **Forgive because we have been forgiven so much** - To refuse to forgive is hypocritical. Just as our divine King has demonstrated maximum compassion toward us, even when we were still rebelling against Him, so we need to do the same toward others. To do otherwise make us hypocrites.
2. **Forgive because we are only hurting ourselves not to** - To refuse to forgive inflicts inner torment upon us. At the end of the parable, the king handed the slave over to the “torturers.” This word in the Greek biblical text means “plague” or “torment.” Elsewhere in Scripture it’s used in its verb form to speak of a person suffering “great pain” (Mt. 8:6) and to describe the misery of a man pleading for relief in hell (Lk.16:23-24). The use of this word in the last line of the parable makes its closing message quite clear... when we refuse to forgive those who offend us, we will suffer the consequences of torturous thoughts, feelings of misery, and agonizing unrest within. It could well be describing the very real physical effects that an unforgiving spirit has on our body... the gnawing guilt that causes ulcers, the bitterness and inner anger that can cause stress, high blood pressure and a strain on the human heart, the seed of the disease of resentment that could indeed be the seed of other diseases to the immune system. Wow!

Q. DEAR BILLY GRAHAM: I know we're supposed to forgive people who've hurt us, but why should we? It doesn't change them in any way, so why bother? They're probably just going to hurt us all over again the next time they get an opportunity. — F. M.

How would you respond to this person?

A. DEAR F.M.: One reason we ought to forgive those who've hurt us is simply because God commands us to do so. Jesus warned, *"If you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins"* (Matthew 6:15).

But why does God command us to forgive others — even if they don't deserve it or even want it? One reason is because of what an unforgiving spirit does to us. Think of it a moment: If someone hurts you, what happens to your attitude toward them? You know the answer: You'll be filled with anger and bitterness, and you may even try to strike back and hurt them in some way. And these feelings will stay in your heart as long as you fail to forgive that person. In fact, they'll become like a poison in your soul, robbing you of your joy and turning you into someone who is sour and bitter and angry at life. The Bible warns, *"See to it ... that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many"* (Hebrews 12:15).

But it doesn't need to be this way — not if we begin to see the other person through the eyes of Jesus. He loves them in spite of their failures — and so should we. Don't let bitterness crowd out your joy, but ask God to help you forgive others just as he has forgiven you — freely and fully. Then ask him to help you show Christ's love to them, and to bring them to himself

II. CLARIFICATION

James builds upon Christ's prior thoughts pertaining to the confession of sin, extending the practicality of His message — confession from one Christian to another (James 5:16)

1. **The Participants (Who?)** – Brother, fellow Christians. (Note the address of 5:12 and 5:19 – “my brothers”)
2. **The Act (What?)** – These are to confess sins to each other. The idea of “confession” has in intensive meaning, declaring that the sinning Christian is “to make a public, spoken expression or admission of wrong or guilt.”
3. **The Results (Why?)** – Healing is the result of honest, unguarded, unrationalized confession.

2 Warning Concerning Open Public Confession of Wrongs: Misapplication of these truths can lead to further injury and confusion.

1. **Be careful about standing before a body of believer and giving a list of your sins** – The Scripture states we are to confess our sins to “one another” (James 5:16), not to everyone. Discretion is vital, why?

3 Reasons to Use Discretion:

- (1) **Not everyone is equally spiritually mature** – Some cannot handle being accountable with the sins of another person yet. Your failures could cause some babes in Christ to stumble and others to lose heart and drop out.
 - (2) **You could injure others with your confession** – If you have not first dealt with what you will be confessing with those most directly involved, be careful about going before a crowd to confess. Some can be blind-sided by such confessions and further injured
 - (3) **Not everyone needs to know** -
2. **Be careful in your confession that you identify only your own sin** – Do not bring others into your declaration so as to embarrass them by sharing scandalous information.

III. HOW TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

There are two directives you need to remember in order to become a giving and forgiving servant.

2 Directives For Giving and Forgiving Servants:

1. **Focus full on God's forgiving of you** – This will help you to humbly acknowledge any way that you have wronged another and seek his or her forgiveness, but it will also enable you to freely forgive others who may have wronged you recognizing God's great extension of forgiveness toward you.
2. **Deal directly and honestly with any resentment you currently hold against anyone** – Remember the injurious consequences to your physical as well as spiritual wellbeing that result when you are unwilling to forgive others. Also, keep in mind that anytime you are unwilling to forgive another person you give them power over your own life.

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN...

Write About It: What does it really mean to forgive? To be forgiven? Pause and deal with each question and then put your answer down on paper. Seek to describe forgiveness in its full expression.

Act Upon It: This message demands direct action. If you hold unforgiveness against another person – go to him or her and confess it. If you know someone who has something against you – be reconciled.

Talk About It: If you are struggling, or have come through with victory over an area of sin, and it can be shared without an offense, share it with a brother or sister in the Lord.