

## Forgiveness of others sins (Pt 2 Forgiveness)

This is our second study of the word *forgiveness*. In our previous study we looked at the meaning of *forgiveness* and *forgive* and asserted that to forgive means; to let go, lay aside, put away, remission and to pardon. In addition we covered two points; (1) God forgave Israel but his forgiveness did not clear the guilty, and (2) God forgives and clears a Christian's sin today. In this study we will cover an additional two points; (1) When family members sin against us and repent, forgive them, and (2) When our brothers in Christ sin against us and repent, forgive them.

Let us add a little detail to our points:-

### 1. When family members sin against us and repent, then we are to forgive them.

*Gen 50:17 So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when his brothers spake unto him.*

The events of Genesis 37 to 50 are an wonderful story and a good example of what it means to forgive those in our biological family. Let us touch on some of the key points in that story:- Joseph's older brothers had tried to kill him although they didn't physically put a knife in his back. But rather when God gave Joseph a dream that his brothers would bow down to him, and Joseph told his brothers the dream, they took objection to his dream and hated him according to Gen.37: 8. The root cause of their hatred was envy (see Gen.37: 11). The story continues with his brothers out feeding their flocks and his father asked him to check on his brothers and the flocks. When his brothers saw him coming toward them they thought to slay him, put him in a pit and blame his death on a wild beast attack (see verse 20). But the eldest, Rueben, encouraged them not to kill the lad, so instead they stripped him of his coat of many colours and cast him into a pit (verse 24). Then Judah suggested that they sell him to the Ishmeelites so that their hand would not be upon him, because he was their brother (see verse 27). Whilst the brothers were discussing the options some Midianites passed by the pit, pulled Joseph out and sold him to the Ishmeelites before his brothers got there. So his brothers covered up their sin by ripping Joseph's coat, dipping it in blood, and telling their father that an evil beast had devoured him (see verse 33). Joseph ended up in prison and then God raised him up to be second only to Pharaoh. When a famine struck the land his brothers came before Joseph, and after revealing himself to them, they instantly thought that he would hate them (perhaps because they themselves had hated him), so sought Joseph's forgiveness. They fell at his feet and wept, as a sign of their repentance and sorrow at their actions. Whereas the brothers thought there would be retribution, Joseph looked on what had happened as the will of God, and so he told them not to fear because he is in the place of God (see verse 19). Joseph admitted that his brothers thought evil against him, yet God meant it unto good, and he then fed, comforted and spoke kindly unto them (verse 21).

That would have to be one of the most wonderful examples of brothers grievously sinning against their own 'flesh and blood', then later seeking forgiveness and the aggrieved brother reflecting on the events as the will of God, and not only forgiving his brothers but comforting them and speaking kindly to them. Our learning from this example is that regardless of the sin we commit against those in our family, when there is sorrow or repentance, an acknowledging of wrong-doing, then it is never too much to ask for forgiveness, and it is never too much to let go of their transgressions.

What would have happened if Joseph had turned to his brothers and said "No, I do not forgive you, I can never trust you because you thought evil against me, and I do not know when you might repeat your sin"?

What would have happened if Joseph had turned to his brothers and said "No, I do not forgive you because of the hurt you caused me and our family, because of the lies you told"?

There would have been *no* reconciliation and healing in the family, and there would have been *no* opportunity to rebuild the trust between the brothers, but rather there would have always been doubt, envy, fear, hatred and a need to let go of hurt, caused by sin.

I know families where members do not forgive, perhaps because they do not know what it is to forive, or simply because they are unwilling to pardon another member of the family. When my Dad left home my mother never came to terms with his leaving the family home, and she got cancer, and deteriorated until she passed away in her mid 50s. My brother would say that she never 'got over'

Dad leaving, and perhaps that is how non-believers see forgiveness, where you simply 'get over' something. But if my mother's health had anything to do with my father leaving home, it is likely that she could not forgive him for his action, because when we do not forgive, it can cause us to become bitter (see Acts 8: 23, 24), and bitterness can destroy a person.

What often prevents a person from forgiving another? From the example in Matt.18: 23-25, we see that when a person has compassion on the one asking for forgiveness, then forgiveness is forthcoming, as it was with the king and his servant who owed him money (see verse 27). And this is confirmed when the servant then did not show forgiveness to one of his fellow servants, where he said, "shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?" Hence, those who are unable, or unwilling to show compassion or pity on their fellow-man, are those who do not forgive their fellow-man who sins against them.

The world is full of families where there is no forgiveness, where a member of the family is unwilling to show another member pity or compassion, yet in the same breath they will acknowledge that they do not do everything right, and therefore they also need others forgiveness when *they* fall short of expectations. But that is our flesh, and the devil uses our unwillingness to forgive to discourage believers and keep the unsaved in a place of torment.

Let us say to those in our family, "please forgive me", when we speak harshly or cause pain and grief. If I apologise to my brother for my tongue when I am at his home, he is likely to say, "oh that is okay", as though he simply brushes it off as nothing. If I continue to lash out with my tongue and never ask for forgiveness, would he simply brush it off? My continual sin is likely to build up, but if I keep short accounts and ask for his forgiveness each time I sin this way then he has nothing to hold against me, unless he chooses not to let my sin go, then it will affect him, not me, so let us feel compassion and pity for those in our family, our biological families. Just because a person does not know the Lord and often struggles with the idea of forgiveness (as many non-believers do), that does not mean that we cannot show them pity. And when we sin against them, may we ask for forgiveness, and may we forgive them when they sin against us, that they may see the need to forgive the members of their family. So, be encouraged when family members sin against us and then repent, may we show compassion and forgive them.

## 2. When our brothers in Christ sin against us and repent, forgive them.

*Mt.18:21, 22 Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.*

I have made a distinction between forgiving family members and our brothers and sisters in Christ because of the example of Joseph in Genesis, where, although the term brethren is used in the story, the reference is clearly to brothers by birth. In addition, I have kept the first point separate from this point because of the different types of relationships we have with our biological families.

This point which is separate to our first, is when our brothers in Christ sin against us and repent, we are to forgive them. Let us now turn to examples in Scripture where brothers in Christ, or those who were brothers in the nation of Israel, forgave each other.

Let us consider the example of David:-

How many times did Saul hunt down David and try to kill him? Was it seven?

How many times did David forgive him and point out that he was the Lord's anointed so would not touch him? David showed Saul pity and compassion each time he tried to kill him, and as we learnt in our first point, compassion, and pity are catalysts for forgiveness. And forgiveness that is real is where the person lets go of the other person's sin, where they pardon their transgression, and that is what David did when he refused to lay a hand on Saul.

When it comes to The New Testament of the Lord Jesus Christ we establish that we are to forgive our brethren not just seven times, but seventy times seven, that is 490 times. Which would be like the Lord answering Peter's question in Matt.18: 21 & 22 with 'infinity'. In Lk.17: 3, 4, Jesus told his disciples that if their brethren were to trespass against them seven times in one day, and repent, they were to forgive them. Is that what you do when your brother in Christ does wrong by you? And remember, the brother is to show repentance, he is to come to you and say "I am sorry", he is to turn from his sin, turn toward God and do work meet for repentance. Well, that is our repentance towards God according to Acts (26: 20), and there is no reason for it to be any different when it applies to our brethren.

Imagine if the first-century church put into action the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ and they forgave their brethren seventy times seven. If there would there have been so much division in the church?

Paul counselled the church at Ephesus to forgive (see Eph.4: 32), without end, which is a similar teaching to the Lord. And what are the sentiments that surrounded his teaching on forgiveness toward our brethren? They include; "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice. Verse 32; And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." So the act of forgiveness toward our brethren encompasses the removal of bitterness, wrath, and anger, evil speaking and malice, whilst on the positive side, we show kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness. Why? Because of what Christ has done for *us*, because He has forgiven *us*. Could you imagine what sort of body that would be if those in the body of Christ showed kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness, without end? It would be a body knit together in charity, which is the bond of perfectness (see Col.3: 14), because charity, according to 1Cor.13, includes longsuffering towards our brethren, suffering long with their sin, with their faults.

Then in 1Cor.6 there is the example where the brethren were clearly not forgiving each other, but rather taking them to court, and not before the believers, but before the unbelievers. And Paul says "Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? Why do ye not rather [suffer yourselves to] be defrauded?" (1Cor 6:7). Paul's teaching to the church is to forgive their brethren, that includes repentance, but also taking the wrong of our brother such that we suffer ourselves at his expense. I suggest that before a person can take that attitude toward their brother in Christ, they would first have to forgive him, let go his sin, and so pardon him before they can then take their brothers wrong.

Is that what you do when a brother wrongs you?

Is that your attitude to those in your church when they sin against you?

We all sin before God, and we all sin against our brethren from time to time. When we do so, let us go to our brother and ask for his forgiveness, repent, turn from our sin and face the Lord. And when we are asked by other brethren to forgive them, then let us wholeheartedly let go and put away their sin. Why? Because Christ has forgiven us. If we do not forgive our brothers and sisters in Christ then we will only feel bitter toward them and such bitterness will also cause division. So when we do not forgive our brethren we are serving the purposes of the devil who destroys, divides, discourages and delays. Whereas, when we forgive one another we are being obedient to Christ and the teachings to the church, and we enable healing to take the place of division. Let us therefore go to our brother when we have done wrong, and let us ask for his forgiveness, and if our brother sins against us, then let us forgive him, and if he sins again, let go his sin again. For Christ continues to forgive our sin and so should we pardon our brethren.

Having said what we have said, let us say it again. In this our second study on the word *forgiveness*, we have covered two points; (1) When family members sin against us and repent, forgive them, and (2) When our brothers in Christ sin against us and repent, forgive them.