

WHY ME? HELP AND HOPE FOR THE HURTING: SECTION THREE

Three Responses That Empower the Sufferer – Forgiveness/The Implication

If God in His love has forgiven us all our sins through faith in the death, burial and resurrection of our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ; shouldn't we also forgive those who sin against us? Yet we don't always follow through on this implication. When we don't forgive, we only intensify the pain and hurt that we feel from having been sinned against, as well as failing to respond to the suffering imposed on us by others in a manner that God desires. In turn, we miss out on the healing and growth that God can and does provide in the context of such adversity. This is one of the most important lessons that each of us as Christians must not only learn but apply.

Peter had such a need, revealed in a question he asks His Savior in Matthew 18:21 – **“Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?”** In asking that question, Peter was certainly hoping for an answer in the affirmative. However, the reply he receives must have made him regret having asked the question in the first place. Jesus responds in v22 – **“I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.”** No doubt, Peter regarded this requirement to be overly demanding and unreasonable, but it wasn't. In order to prove that to Peter, Jesus shares with him and the other disciples a parable about forgiveness.

The lesson consists of the story of a king whose slave owes him ten thousand talents. Called to an accounting for this enormous debt, it is apparent that he does not have the means to repay. When the king orders the slave and his family to be sold in order to receive whatever repayment is possible, the servant falls on the ground and begs his master, **“Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.”** In response, the king feels compassion for the servant and releases him, forgiving him the entire debt. This is clearly a picture of an individual sinner coming to God for salvation, the forgiveness of sin, and receiving it. Some have questioned the desire of the slave to make restitution as an expression of self-righteousness. But based on Luke 19:1-10, it seems to be an indication of genuine repentance. Others have taken issue with the fact that the slave was already involved in servitude to the king, indicating an already saved condition. However, every human being, by virtue of our creation, exists as a servant of the King, since He is also our Creator. Thus, the real issue isn't our servitude but our indebtedness. Has that indebtedness been resolved through the offer of the king's forgiveness? From this perspective, the human race consists of two groups – forgiven and unforgiven servants.

Yet the story doesn't end there. In Matthew 18:28-34, the inference is that the privilege of being forgiven carries a parallel responsibility to forgive, which the pardoned servant does not fulfill. Instead, when he meets a fellow slave who owes him a pittance, compared to what he owed the king, the forgiven servant displays a terrible unforgiving spirit. When the king hears of it, he calls the pardoned slave to an accounting, rebuking him for his wickedness, reminding him of the privilege he had received and the responsibility that now went with it. The king then punishes the slave by handing him over to torturers, until he repays the debt owed to his master, which now consists of a forgiving spirit toward others (vv33-34). That is made clear by Christ as He applies the point of the parable to Peter and the other disciples in v35; an application which extends to every Christian, as we will discover in our next segment.