

Place: Lurgan Baptist 26:6:05

Reading: Matthew 18:21-35

## FROM SIMON TO PETER

### 10. “ THE FORGIVEN WILL FORGIVE,”

The Pastor of an Evangelical church handed a questionnaire to each person in his congregation asking them to answer three questions about the aims of the church and the means of achieving them.

(1) What should be the corporate aims of this church ?

(2) What prevents us from achieving these aims as fully as we would like ?

(3) What spiritual and practical steps are needed in the church to help us achieve these aims ?

For some people in the church it was the first time they had thought about the church's present spiritual condition, and almost without exception the congregation saw a two fold goal for the church. ***A deeper and more meaningful worship of God and stemming from this a desire to serve the Lord more effectively.*** In other words they wanted their worship to be deeper and their service more effective. Impossible ? Not at all. With the Lord's help these aims could become a reality in that church. So what was stopping the church from fulfilling these aims ? One member said, “ *the trouble is we don't get on together as well as we could.* ” Another said, “ *not all of us share the same ideas on how to bring about what we want.* ” Still others wrote, “ *the trouble is the old ones don't understand us young ones.* ” Some others said, “ *relationships amongst some of the congregation seem somewhat strained and this obviously effects our worship and service.* ” One basic thought emerged “ *it would be a great church if it weren't for the people.* ” You see problems in personal relationships in the church appeared as the largest single hindrance to deeper worship and more effective service. ***People were the problem.*** You see the world is full of broken relationships, wounded spirits, and unresolved quarrels.

Its one thing to have an experience of the grace of God for ourselves. Its quite another thing to live up to our Christian calling in a church alongside other believers. For as we all know its not always easy for people to live together, worship together, and serve together. Personal relationships become strained. We rub each other up

the wrong way. How important then it is that a forgiving spirit be found amongst us. Now in this question and answer session between Peter and the Lord Jesus, the Saviour is teaching Peter one lesson. Its this, “ *The Forgiven will Forgive.*” Lets come to this passage and notice,

## (1) A PROBLEM IN THE CHURCH

The problem that is often found in the church is this. A breach of fellowship. One brother sins against the other and fellowship is broken. ( Matt 5:23-24 ) Now its interesting to notice that Peters question about this problem grows out of everything that precedes it in this chapter. You see in this chapter there is brought before us the causes of this problem. What causes a breach of fellowship between Christians ? Well look at the chapter. The first thing is,

### (a) A COMPETITIVE SPIRIT:

Did you notice how the chapter begins ? The Lord Jesus is addressing himself to the self-seeking, arrogant disciples who were jostling for position. They were asking Christ, “ *Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven ?* ” ( 18:1 ) Now this was the same spirit that had governed their private talk on the way to Capernaum.

“ *For by the way they had disputed among themselves who should be the greatest.* ” ( Mk 9:34 ) Perhaps they were a little bit jealous about the privileges that Peter had been granted by Christ ( 16:18-20 ) Maybe they had been complaining in Peters hearing, “ *why should Peter lead us ? Why should he have authority over us ? We're as important as he is.* ” I wonder was Peter feeling a little discouraged, so he turned to Christ and asked Him, “ *How long is this going to go on Lord ? How many times do I have to forgive these men ?* ” (a) “ *Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven ?* ” Now listen, when you meet a Christian who wants to be first you're in the presence of danger. Make no mistake about that. This attitude may come from the pastor in the pulpit or from the person in the pew. But wherever it comes from the Devil is there. ( Is 14:14 ) And division will be there, for a desire for pre-eminence, power, position within the local church inevitably results in a breach of fellowship. Is it not tragic that jealousy, power struggles, competitiveness have often detracted us from deeper worship, and more effective service ( Eph 4:31-32 ) (a) But notice again,

### (b) AN OFFENSIVE ATTITUDE:

In ( 18:5-14 ) Christ speaks against those who cause the least of his little ones to

stumble. Now the Lord Jesus saw a necessary connection between the attitude of pride, the attitude that tells me I deserve first place in the kingdom, and the sin of causing offence to a little one – the sin of belittling someone, who is in my estimation inferior to me. It's a progressive thought. Arrogance leads to offence, magnification of self leads to disparagement of others and this causes a breach of fellowship. No wonder Paul wrote in “ *Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.* ” ( Phil 2:3-5 ) Do you possess the very spirit that was in Christ ? A humble, selfless, lowly spirit ? (a) (b)

### (c) ***AN INSENSITIVE HEART:***

A heart that is not sensitive to or responsive to the teaching of Christ. Now what is the teaching of Christ ? ( 18:15 ) What's the first step in solving a personal difference ? Go to the person who has offended you. ***Keep the matter private.*** Did you note how the Saviour puts it, “ *between thee and him alone.* ” Now if the offending brother listens to you and sees that he has done wrong and is sorry and repents ( Lk 17:3 ) then forgive him and forget the matter and in so doing you

will heal the breach. If that does not work, go back again and take one or two believers along to pray and counsel. If that fails then the issue must be taken to the church.

But do you here the tragedy of unforgiving sin ! ***First two people are involved, then three or four, then the whole congregation.*** You see when sin is not dealt with it spreads. Now let me ask a question, is the instruction of the Lord Jesus really followed in the local church ?

Well let's think ! If someone wrongs you as a believer, do you speak to them personally ? Or do you blaze it abroad publicly ? When I wrong you as a Christian do you come to me or go to the elders ? When the elders wrong you, do you come to me, when you should be going to them ? When other believers wrong you do you come to me, or the elders instead of going to them ? My ... when a brother or sister in Christ offends you do you stay away from the services ? Wallow in self-pity ? Do you give them the silent treatment ? No. No. Says Christ, “ *follow my guidelines, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone.* ” ( 18:15 ) Now if this instruction were followed most of our problems would be solved. Do you see the things that cause a breach of fellowship ? (a) (b) (c) (1) But notice here,

## (2) A PRINCIPLE FOR THE CHURCH

The principle is simply this. Be magnanimous, generous, sincere in your forgiveness. The word forgive means “*to dismiss absolutely from ones thought.*” You see the person who forgives does not keep an account of the offences pardoned. A lady told her Pastor, “*I'll forgive Mrs. X., but I won't have anything to do with her. I don't want to see her again. I won't let her in my house.*” The pastor replied, “*Suppose Christ treated you the same way, would have nothing to do with you, nor ever let you into His heavenly home ?*” How often we react, “*I'll forgive, but I wont forget.*” I heard about a man who really loved dogs. He devoted his life to them, he read about them, and even gave lectures to other dog lovers. One day he decided to cement the area in front of his house. His neighbour watched from his window as he smoothed out the last square of cement. Just then a large dog appeared and walked through the fresh cement, leaving paw prints behind. The man muttered something under his breath and sorted out the damage. He then went inside to get something to put around the area he had cemented. But when he got inside more dog tracks. He sorted out the cemented area again and went into the house. Five minutes later the same thing happened. Again he smoothed out the area, went inside, but the same dog reappeared and sat right in the middle of the fresh cement. He grabbed his gun went outside and shot the dog dead. His neighbour rushed over and said, “*Why did you do that ? I thought you liked dogs ?*” The man thought for a moment and then said, “*I do, I do like dogs, but that's in the abstract, I hate dogs in the concrete.*” My .... is that not how many of us feel about forgiveness ? We love to hear about forgiveness in the abstract, but when its hits close to home, we hate it in the concrete. ***Forgiveness is the virtue we most enjoy and least employ.***

Yet Christ has both forgiven and forgotten our sins against Him. Forgiveness is a very beautiful thing for a Christian is never more Godlike when he or she forgives and forgets. Now we see here that Peter was willing to forgive but notice that,

### (a) **PETER'S FORGIVENESS WAS LIMITED:**

Look if you will at ( 18:21 ) “*Lord how oft ....,*” Peter was willing to forgive up to seven times. This was being generous. You see the Rabbis of Peters day forbade a man to ask for forgiveness more than three times.

( Job 33:29-30 ) That meant that a man only needed to grant it three times. Peter

was being generous but he was not being generous enough for he was thinking of forgiveness more as a matter of arithmetic than a matter of attitude. ***Forgiveness is not a matter of calculations in the head but of compassion in the heart.*** Peter was setting a limit. Thus far and no further. Have you ever thought like that ? Have you ever said, “ *I'll have to draw a line and set a limit ?* ” A wife found it difficult to speak with her unfaithful but genuinely repentant husband. This woman, with several small children, was advised to forgive and forget, not to be proud and stubborn, but to take him back. She took the advice. She reported that the eight years that followed, before his death were their happiest. (a) But,

### **(b) CHRIST'S FORGIVENESS WAS LIMITLESS:**

Look at ( 18:22 ) Now we miss then point, of course if we think that Christ means the total of four hundred and ninety here. Christ is not saying to Peter, “ *Peter you're not going far enough, there is a ceiling but its much higher than seven its four hundred and ninety, you must forgive your brother 490 times Peter and then stop.* ” No. No. This phrase means unlimited forgiveness. The believer is to show unlimited and unending forgiveness. This means forgiving someone whenever he repents of the wrong, for a forgiven man cannot put limits to the forgiveness of others. Tell me do you ever go about saying, “ *how often must I love my wife, husband, children ?* ” Of course you don't you love them without ever stopping. Do you see what Christ is saying ?

“ *Forgive without ever stopping, be kind towards your brother always.* ” So there's (1) (2) But notice there is,

### **(3) A PARABLE TO THE CHURCH**

You see, to illustrate this truth that *the forgiven must forgive* Christ told this parable of the unforgiving servant. A servant owned his master the large sum of 10,000 talents ( three million pounds ) and threatened with the enslavement of himself and his family for the rest of his life this man began to plead with the King for time ( 18:26 ) In response the King did more than gave him time, he actually forgave the man the entire debt. *I mean how would you feel ?* If you had incurred a three million pound debt and it was cleared in a moment of time. Would you not be jumping for joy ? But did you notice how this man reacted ? On his way out from settling his affairs with the King he met a fellow-servant who owned him how much ? A trifling £10-00.

Without any scruples at all the forgiven servant seized his fellow servant by the throat and demanded immediate payment of the small debt. Now when that person sought mercy he received none but when was cast in prison until he could pay the

whole amount. News filtered back to the King who was justly angered by what he heard. Calling his forgiven servant back he denounced his unforgiving spirit. ( 18:33 ) *Now that's the parable, but what's the point ?* Christ is saying two things here,

**(a) FORGIVENESS IS A MARK OF THE CHRISTIAN:**

Its something that every believer should be able to do and should want to do from his heart. ( 18:35 ) You see the heart of a child of God is different from the heart of a child of Satan. The heart of a child of God is regenerate. It has the Holy Spirit in it. ( Rom 8:9 ) That's why the child of God is expected to forgive repeatedly and willingly from the heart. ( 18:35 ) My... its inconceivable that a child of God who has been forgiven of a three million pound debt should go out and press his fellow-believer for the ten pounds he owes him. Do you see the point ? I mean which is the greater ? Your sin against God ( 18:24 ) or your fellow-Christians sin against you ? Why you say, “ *My sin against the Lord.* ”

Well says the Lord Jesus, “ *its inconceivable that you having been forgiven from such enormous sins should then go out and not forgive your brothers trivial offences against you.* ” (a) My .... do you belong to that sad company who will not, do not forgive ? Are you nursing the memory of someone's wrongs against you ? Someone who asked for your forgiveness but you as a professing child of God refused to forgive and forget ? Satan came and whispered in your ear and gave you a thousand reasons why you should not forgive your offending brother but Christ said you should for (a) ( Mk 11:25 Lk 23:42 Acts 7:59-60 Eph 4:32 ) My .... Do you need to seek God's face afresh, that you might see the greatness of your sin against God ? Do you need to pray that God would renew a right spirit within you ?

Your point is, of course, that the offending person does not deserve forgiveness. But remember this, by that principle you, yourself would not be forgiven. (a) Someone has said that to “ *be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.* ” I tell you that's why Elisabeth Elliot and those other widows whose brave husbands were murdered by the Auca Indians, returned to those very Indians in Ecuador, South America with the message of forgiveness. (a) But there's something else here,

**(b) FORGIVENESS IS A MUST FOR THE CHRISTIAN:**

C.S. Lewis said, “ everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea until he has something to forgive.” Yet forgiveness (b) Why ? Because an unforgiving spirit, a

harbouring of grudges is fatal to spirituality. ( Eph 4:30 ) Did you notice that the forgiven servant who would not forgive his fellow-servant was “ *delivered to the tormentors,*”

( 18:34 ) Do you know that we ourselves are the losers if we do not forgive others ? We may think that we are hurting them, but in reality we are only hurting ourselves and our loved ones. The word here for “ *tormentors,*” carries the idea of inner mental torment as much as physical torture. *Is this not what an unforgiving heart always experiences ?* Torment. I have met Christians who carry grudges, and in speaking with them I've discovered how miserable they really are. My .... what happened to this man will happen to us, unless we learn to forgive, and forgive and forgive. The tormentors will come and take us away. What tormentors ? The hidden torturers of anger and bitterness that eat your inside out. The torturers of frustration and malice that gave you ulcers, high blood pressure, headaches. The hidden torturers that make you lie awake at night stewing over every wrong that has been done to you.

My .... here's the rub. While we often try to punish and imprison them who hurt us, the reverse actually happens.

When we don't forgive we end up being tortured and imprisoned. Did you hear about the two men who were in a nursing home and had been quarrelling for years ? One of them though he was on his deathbed so he called his enemy to his bed and said, “ *John I forgave you for what you have said and done against me over the years and I want you to do the same for me.*” The other man's eyes filled with tears and he agreed that he would like to forgive and be forgiven. Then the guy in the bed said,

“ *But if I get better this doesn't count.*” I wonder as a believer this .... do you need to be set free from internal torment that flows from an unforgiving spirit ?

Someone has said “ *When I genuinely forgive I set a prisoner free, and then discover that the prisoner I set free is me.*”

Earnest Hemingway loved to write about the country of Spain. In his short story, “ ***The Capital of the World,***” Hemingway tells of a father and son who had stopped talking to one another. Things got so bad that the son left home. After several years the father wanted to mend the relationship and so he looked everywhere for his son. When he came to the capital of Madrid he decided to go to the newspaper office and there took out a big ad in the newspaper that said this, “ *Paco, please meet at 12 noon tomorrow in front of the newspaper office .... all is forgiven. I love you.*” The next day at noon eight hundred men named Paco were standing at the front of the building.

I suppose we have some Paco's here this .... in need of forgiveness. We have also

some who need to extend forgiveness to others ? Do you need to ask forgiveness from some Christian ? Can you think of a person right now ? Someone you have wronged, and you haven't owned up for it ? Are you willing to go to that person and make things right ? Do you need to extend forgiveness to someone ? Have you been nursing a grudge ? Are you giving someone the silent treatment ? Are you ready to forgive the debt ? Maybe you are this .... and not saved. Are you ready to admit your sins to a Holy God and receive His forgiveness ?