

"Forgive Us!, Part III"

Forgiving Our Neighbor

Fifth Petition in the Lord's Prayer, Part Three

Matthew 18:1-20

February 22, 2004
by C.W. Powell

Matthew 18:1-20

1 At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

2 And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,

3 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

5 And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.

6 But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

7 Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!

8 Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire.

9 And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.

10 Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.

11 For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.

12 How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?

13 And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than

of the ninety and nine which went not astray.

14 Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

19 Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.

20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

The Heidelberg Catechism

Q126: What is the fifth petition?

A126: And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; that is, be pleased, for the sake of Christ's blood, not to impute to us miserable sinners our manifold transgressions, nor the evil which always cleaves to us; as we also find this witness of Thy grace in us, that it is our full purpose heartily to forgive our neighbor.

This is the third message on this petition and I will be speaking from the entire 20 verses from Matthew 18. This is important for us to consider, because it goes to the heart of what it means for us to love our neighbor and live at peace with him.

In my comments on this passage, I will be referring to parallel passages in the other gospels. I may or may not give the reference, but they are easily found. You realize, of course, that each of the writers, Matthew, Mark, and Luke did not write their accounts in strict chronological order, and they did not all include exactly the same details in each of the accounts, but all together, they form a wonderful account of the life and work of our Lord Jesus. There are several things I would like to say concerning this passage.

I. The first lesson is humility. Christ would have us humble ourselves and not seek honor and greatness. We know that the disciples did not come to Christ willingly, but he had asked them what they were arguing about. We must serve one another, and not seek to gain authority and power over each other. It is good to desire office in the church, but it is good to seek it for the purpose of serving the people of God and using your gifts to edify them in the faith. This is how this passage opens.

II. The second lesson is to teach us about offences, or wrongs. An offence is something that is wrong or that you perceive to be wrong. First he warns about the necessity for offences.

- a. God has a purpose in the wrongs that are done in the world. Everything is for the good of God's people and although God does not cause the wickedness in the heart that produces the wrong, yet the act itself is a part of God's design and purpose. The testing

that we endure is for the purpose of purifying and transforming us into the image of Jesus Christ our Savior. “It must needs be that offenses come, but woe to them by which they come.”

b. This means that we are not to be angry with the persons who wrong us, for we must see these things as coming from God.

c. But it also means that we are not to wrong our neighbor. We must not allow malice and hatred and the desire for revenge to cause us to act in a wrong way toward him.

d. Hence: when wrongs are done to me, I see them as coming from God and learn from them; in giving wrongs to others, I must repent the sin of the heart that caused me to do the wrong thing, and make it right with my neighbor.

e. I am not to seek revenge in thought, word, or deed. The law calls me to go to extreme lengths not to do wrong to my neighbor, for every thing that is offensive must be removed from my life.

f. The angels are sent to guard and to protect those who shall be heirs of eternal life—not a guardian angels for each believer—there is no evidence for that idea—but many angels who will be witnesses against those who wrong the people of God, not only children.

So now, laying the foundation in humility and the providence of God, He passes on to what we are to do in the event that some wrong is done to us.

III. The illustration of the lost sheep. Luke deals with this much more at length than Matthew does, speaking of three lost things: a lost coin, the prodigal son, and the lost sheep. But the meaning is the same.

a. We must learn to treat one another with at least the common decency that is natural to human nature. A woman who has lost a precious coin diligently sweeps the house until she finds it. A man who has a lost sheep will go out into the wilderness and seek for it. A father whose son has straying and wasted his inheritance will rejoice when the son returns to the home. A man whose ox has fallen into a ditch will go and get it out on the Sabbath Day.

b. The lesson is that we are not to allow our own hurts to keep us from the critical thing: serving the spiritual needs of our brothers and sisters.

IV. How this is to be done. Matthew 18:15-20. This is an explication of the law given in Leviticus 19:

11 Ye shall not steal, neither deal falsely, neither lie one to another.

12 And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD.

13 Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning.

14 Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I am the LORD.

15 Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour.

16 Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour: I am the LORD.

17 Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.

18 Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.

a. The words of Luke are appropriate here: "Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him." Take heed to yourself when you are wronged. That is a very dangerous time for you. Anger, thoughts of revenge, ill will. Strife is like a dam when it breaks—you cannot put the water back in the lake—it has rushed downhill and destroyed everything in its path. Take heed to yourself.

b. The procedure:

i. Consideration is not to be taken for your hurt feelings, your outrage, or such.

What is to be considered is the good of your neighbor: If he has sinned against you, then there are other serious spiritual conditions that he needs to face. Is this your thought? What of your brother.

ii. Go to him. Seek to restore him to fellowship and peace in the church; restore your own relationship. He should repent and fix what he did wrong. This is right and proper. Luke says, "If he repent, forgive him."

iii. If he will not restore fellowship [hear you], take witnesses. This is the beginning of the judicial matter.

iv. If he will not hear the witnesses, take it to the church; to the duly appointed elders of the church, who will decide the matter.

V. It is not God's will for strife and ill-will to exist in the church year after year after year. He has given us a way to right wrongs and restore fellowship. It is not optional. It must be done.

VI. Two different cases:

a. If you have wronged another. "Leave your gift at the altar..."

b. If others have wronged you: "Go to him..."

c. In either case, you and I are obligated to talk to our neighbors. How changed our churches would be if we could learn how to solve the problems of strife and contention.

VII. Why are we to do this: Because of the love of Christ. If He has died for us, we ought to lay down our lives for our brethren; we are to serve one another as Christ has served us. God bless you.