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Forgiveness - Part 1

Introduction

At the beginning of any study, secular or scriptural, two matters are to be considered:

- a) It is important to know precisely what is being spoken of or being under a judicial microscope. In this case it is vital to understand what forgiveness means.
 - i) The word forgiveness means to “let go” as in the forgoing a debt (Matt. 18:23-35), but it goes deeper. It means to “let go” any first response of anger or demands. It does not keep an account of the wrong committed for, “Charity (love) suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil” (1 Cor. 13:4, 5).
 - ii) Forgiveness is an attitude of the offended individual to the offender. It is an act of love for, “love covereth all sins” (Prov. 10:12). It is grace that flows from the heart of God through the offended, even if the offender never confesses or asks for it. The parable of the Lord and the two debtors is very relevant concerning this truth. We who by the grace of God have been forgiven unspeakably more than anyone has done toward us, surely it behooves us to be more than willing and heartily forgive those who offend us (Matt. 18:21-34; Eph. 4:32; Col. 2:13; 1 Jn. 2:12).
 - iii) An illustration: When John wrote His gospel it was to present the evidence that Jesus was the Christ the Son of God (Jn. 20:30-31). This automatically leads to several fundamental questions such as:
 1. “What is the difference between Jesus being the Christ and being the Son of God?”
 2. “What is meant by these terms?”
 3. “Why is it so important to believe these truths?” In other words, there must be a clarification and understanding of the terms.
- The same is now applied to “Forgiveness”.
 1. “What does it mean to be forgiven?”
 2. “Why does an individual need forgiveness?”
 3. “Who is the forgiver and on what grounds does He determine what is right or wrong and so judge what needs forgiveness and what does not?”

b) What forgiveness does not mean:

- i) Forgives does not mean to condone a wrong committed. To do so is a wickedness before God who caused it to be written as a warning, “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil” (Isa. 5:20).
- ii) Neither does it mean to pretend the offense never occurred, for while sins are forgiven, there is also a governmental level to be reckoned with. David was forgiven his sins but it did not stop the consequences (2 Sam. 12:9-13; Gal. 6:7).
- iii) Most importantly, it does not mean allowing individuals to take advantage of one’s kindly disposition, and then allow oneself to be taken in again (Prov. 14:15; 22:3).
- iv) Having a forgiving spirit does not mean one glories in such an attitude for love (charity) vaunteth not itself (1 Cor. 13:4).

A word of caution:

- a) Before there can be forgiveness there ought to be introspection, which simply means to look inwardly and “with a cool head” and ask oneself, “Are there any grounds for being offended?” I recall an incident where an individual for several years held an offense against me which I knew nothing about. Apparently I had walked past him to go to speak to someone I needed to communicate with. I did not even see the individual. Did he have a right to be offended? Had he put out his hand to ask me a question and then I ignored him, he would have been right in a certain way to be offended, but that never happened. The scriptures teach, “Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry; for anger resteth in the bosom of fools” (Ecc. 7:9).

If the offense is of little consequence, do as when in a family situation, “Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye” (Col. 3:13). Deal with the matter righteously.

Forgiveness in the scriptures

The word forgive and its associates is found 98 times in the scriptures. In the Old Testament the first reference is when the messenger was sent by Joseph's brethren to remind him of the petition of his father Jacob, who when dying said to Joseph (the offended and very wronged one), "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" (Gen. 50:17). Then note the response of Joseph, this was forgiveness manifested, "And Joseph wept when they spake unto him" (Gen. 50:17). The last Old Testament reference is, "And it came to pass, that when they had made an end of eating the grass of the land, then I said, O Lord GOD, forgive, I beseech thee: by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small" (Amos 7:2).

- a) "Forgiveness" in the Old Testament occurs once (Psa. 103:3).
- b) "Forgiven" occurs 27 times, the first and last references are Lev. 4:20 and Isa. 33:24.
- c) "Forgiving" occurs twice, the first and last references are Ex. 34:7 and Num. 14:18.
- d) "Forgive" is found 20 times, the first and last references are Matt. 6:12 and 1 Jn. 1:9.
- e) "Forgiveness" in the New Testament is mentioned 6 times, the first and last references are Mk. 3:29 and Col. 1:14.
- f) "Forgiven" occurs 21 times, the first and last references are Matt. 9:2 and 1 Jn. 2:12.
- g) "Forgiving" occurs twice, the first and last references are Eph. 4:32 and Col. 3:13.

Together: In the entire Bible:

- a) Forgive is mentioned 39 times
- b) Forgiveness is mentioned 7 times
- c) Forgiven is mentioned 48 times
- d) Forgiving is mentioned 4 times

It is perfectly clear that any theme which God speaks of, reiterates, and emphasizes, as much as a total of 78 times, it is not without significance. This is put into a very great sharpness when it is realized that to convey this truth God uses some four different Hebrew and five different Greek words.

One of the hardest "things to forgive" in a believers life

One of the hardest things to do is to forgive ones self. Indeed, it is easier to accept God's forgiveness than to forgive myself for doing what I did. The individual ought not to be surprised at what they have done for the old nature is still in us. It has neither been removed or modified but until the moment we die or the Lord comes and changes us, we are capable of any sin in the book. Of course some would say, "I would never commit such and such a sin that is contrary to the scriptures". We need to be careful for the scriptures say, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). We have no true awareness of how depraved the flesh is.

The foundation for Forgiveness, whither human or divine

When dealing with the sin and trespass offerings there is the repeated phrase, "It shall be forgiven him" (Lev. 4:26, 31, 5:10, 13, 16, 18; 6:7; Num. 15:28). In all the scriptures the only sin which is unpardonable is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:31; Lk. 12:10).

This raises the question, "On what grounds did God forgive?" It is of great importance to observe that God forgave sins in such a way that He lost nothing. This is shown in the practical lives of the Children of Israel. When someone took something which was not theirs etc., then not only had they to restore the item or its value, but a fifth part was to be added to it (Lev. 5:16; 6:5; 27:13, 15, 31; Num. 5:7). The damaged one must never be the loser. Thus, for God to forgive sins, neither He or the Lord must lose anything, but indeed be better off. God's fulness of forgiveness can only be known because of the complete restoration of all that God had lost, the righteous removal of sin and all condemnation due to sin, and the way to full fellowship to God restored.

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Thankfully God is a merciful God who shows grace in forgiving love, and even with those who are under discipline as seen clearly in Esther. The Jews at the time of Esther were far from God, being disciplined by God. But wonder of wonders, He even then bestowed His tender mercies toward them. The governmental powers had set a date to eradicate the Jews but they left God out of the equation. For an unknown time God had been letting the wicked Haman set his plans in motion and then at the morning which was to be the morning of his greatest triumph, God destroyed every vestige of his plans (Esther 3:5-15; 5:1; 6:1-12). How merciful of God.

To be continued...

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