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Forgiveness & Judgment - Part 2

Introduction

Many years ago on a meeting night I had been very unkind to one of our children. Which one it was I do not recall but feeling utterly ashamed of myself I went downstairs to confess my rashness before God and my failure in manifesting His patient character. It was dreadful. I could not go to meeting, what a manifestation of hypocrisy that would have been. Sitting downstairs confessing and re-confessing my sin and failure suddenly I heard the most beautiful words being sung. Our elder daughter was upstairs, and knowing nothing of what I was going through had begun to play a tape. The words rang out so clearly, “Forgiven, Forgiven, I’m Happy and Free”. What a relief it was, I did not need to ask for forgiveness. Feeling the guilt of my wrongs and confessing it was suffice for the fulness of God’s love to embrace me. O the blessedness and joyous confidence of unilateral and unreserved forgiveness.

- a) I expect this is how David felt after his sin with Bathsheba and arranging for the killing of her husband. (2 Sam. 15-17, 12:9; Psa. 51:1-14). Darkness covered his soul. There was an emptiness in his innermost being, a major component of life was gone, that is, his peace and fellowship with God. Then being aware that the Lord had forgiven him, he wrote, “Blessed” (which is the noun form of the verb “blessed” in Luke 1:48, which means happy) is the man whose iniquities are forgiven . . . blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute iniquity (Rom. 4:6-7). One can almost sense the sheer exuberance.

Continuing on the the theme of forgiveness there is perhaps a need for re-clarification. Simply and concisely put, 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 willing and heartily forgive those who offend us (Matt. 18:21-34; Eph. 4:32; Col. 2:13; 1 Jn. 2:12).

Due to our sinful nature and distorted personalities there are two possible outcomes to an offense. If we like the individual it can be glossed over, if we do not like them then the offense can be a major thing. This is not just a teaching of the New Testament but when it came to the matter of investigation of an alleged crime in the Old Testament, it had to be righteous and without bias. “If thou shalt hear say in one of thy cities, which the LORD thy God hath given thee to dwell there, saying, Certain men, the children of Belial, are gone out from among you, and have withdrawn the inhabitants of their city, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which ye have not known; Then shalt thou enquire, and make search, and ask diligently; and, behold, if it be truth, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought among you” (Deut. 13:12-14).

The Danger of Treating Rebellion As of Little Consequence

Forgiveness is the removal of all resentment or animosity toward an individual, without any reservation, then granted to that individual and received in fulness when there is confession made of the damage done. Thus, there are two levels of forgiveness, that which is available and that which is received. There is no such a thing as partial forgiveness. It is an “either” or an “or” situation”.

David tried to forgive in a partial way with Absalom his son and let him come back into the city, but it was not sufficient (2 Sam. 14). It was right that David should have forgiven Absalom in his heart, but that forgiveness should never have been granted in the slightest degree until Absalom repented for what he had done. He did not repent nor did he change his ways, nor did he confess any wrong doing and it led to major problems later on.

As I understand it, David made a very grave mistake:

- a) He let his emotions assist in his assessment toward Absalom (2 Sam. 14:1). After the plaintive words of the woman of Tekoah (2 Sam. 14:2; 4-14) David told Joab to bring Absalom back to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 14:23). The forgiveness was only in part for while Absalom was brought back to his own house in Jerusalem, it was not the restoration of full fellowship (2 Sam. 14:24).

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- b) Secondly, Absalom was not repentant. The people greatly admired him (2 Sam. 14:25) and with hypocrisy on Absalom's part and foolishness on David's part, they kissed and made up (2 Sam. 14:33). Then Absalom was clearly seen for what he was, and gathering a number of people began a subtle coup to oust David (2 Sam. 15:1-6). Then pretending to pay his vows, he sought permission to go to Hebron (2 Sam. 15:7-9, and all the while sending spies and increasing in power due to the naivety of the people (2 Sam. 15:11) until David had to flee for his life (2 Sam. 15:23). What a tragic and hard lesson, all because he let an unrepentant son back as if almost nothing had been done wrong.
- c) There should have been no forgiveness shown in the slightest degree, as long as Absalom was unrepentant. Sadly, he was neither repentant for what he had done, change his ways, or confess any wrong. If forgiveness is to be granted, then the offender must be repentant, must confess wrong doing, and must be changed in outlook. I say shown, because while it is available, it cannot be shown until sin etc. is acknowledged.
 - i) This is the attitude in the heart of the offended God, prior to confession, contrition and repentance (Matt. 4:17; Lk. 13:3; Acts 2:38; 17:30). While forgiveness is available for the saint or sinner, restoration of the offender can never be enjoyed until there is repentance.

Before There Can Be Forgiveness The Wrong Must Be Righteously Judged

When we consider righteous judgment then the highest court we can appeal to is the Lord and God Himself. He is the ultimate moral standard and Governor of everything. Therefore, this begs the question, "By what criteria does God judge?" There are a number of passages which deal with the criteria and in them there are several main truths, what an individual knew and how they responded. For instance:

- a) With God and Christ to whom all judgment and execution thereof (Jn. 5:22, 27), there are no inequalities or bias with God, either regarding His Person, attributes, nor human beings. Thus, all His judgments are "true and righteous" (Psa. 19:9; Rev. 16:7; 19:2) and in keeping with His invariable, unchangeable holiness (Josh. 24:19). All will be judged "according to truth" (Rom. 2:2); "deeds/works" (Rom. 2:6; Rev. 20:12, 13; Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10); "without respect of persons" (Rom. 2:11); "knowledge" (Rom. 2:14-16); and "the gospel" (Rom. 2:16). This is how an individual is to be assessed, not by my or our traditions, but only on the Word of God. Sadly this is not always so. How can a person be forgiven for wrong doing and causing a genuine offense when the government of an assembly ignores the plain Scriptures of truth? I know of this happening to one brother and when the accusers saw him, they stood at a distance from him and sought to put on a front before others. Clearly, the wrong was never put right and forgiveness, while available, could never be enjoyed by the perpetrators.

Forgiveness, the Righteousness and Perfection of Morality of God

His morality.

- a) The forgiveness graciously proffered by God toward me necessitates the existence of God as the moral Governor of the Universe. Being such, He cannot just overlook disobedience and defiance and deal with us as individuals as if we never did anything wrong. That would show that His morality meant little to Him, and be sin.
 - i) By His judging of the error and making the wrongdoer aware of the damage done, it shows the value of that which was damaged. Put another way, for God to simply forgive irrespective of that which is done would show little value on that which was damaged. Illustration: I have in my home a Bible dated 1788 by the printer. It is doubly precious to me because of its age and because of whom gave it to me. It is touched with great care. Imagine if someone took my Bible, and through carelessness tore several pages, etc. If I said, "Well it does not matter", it would show that despite all my words it really had little value. However, if I was utterly furious for such carelessness and in righteousness demanded that this individual give me back another identical one, it would not be the same, but it would show that it really did mean something to me and the destroyer would have learnt that lesson.
- b) If God ignored his sense of morality, then would it be morally right for God to treat Hitler as a delightful

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moral upstanding individual? At what point would an individual's despising of God's salvation, secured through the work of His Son, be "not so bad" and "undeserving of punishment"? God is holy and since the wages of sin is death, ultimate separation from God eternally, banished into Hell, is that morally wrong of Him? Does moral justice not have checks and balances? Judgment is based on the fact the individual chose, of their own volition, to reject the sacrifice of the Lord for salvation, knowing judgment and hell awaited them.

- c) One of the observations easily missed is, God never forgives us for our sinful nature! Forgiveness never deals with what we are but with what we do. I cannot help being a sinner by nature. That God cannot forgive. It necessitates being made anew, that is, the new birth. Even in daily life, an individual cannot be forgiven for what they are, only what they do. How foolish to ask someone to forgive me for being from Ireland, or having heart problems. One can only be forgiven for what they do, not what they are. God forgives us our sins. Thank God for that.
- d) God's grace in forgiving love, even with those who are under discipline is seen clearly in Esther. He still bestows His tender mercies toward them. It is a wonder that we are not in utter amazement, mingled with utmost humility and gratitude, rejoicing over every token of affection and therefore love Him more abundantly.
- e) With these thoughts in mind, we see that in the scriptures the moral forgiveness of God is seen in His holy perfection and the righteousness of His judgements.

To be continued...

... Rowan Jennings