

Sunday School Lesson
(Continued from Page 2)

ing second thoughts. No man should allow such a woman as this to touch him, Simon thought; therefore, he questioned whether or not Jesus could be a prophet.

Notice that what Simon objects to here is the touch. As a Pharisee, he would believe that any Jew who allowed himself to be touched by an unclean person, a sinner, himself became unclean. Distinctions such as this had become the great concern of many Pharisees of the type denounced by Jesus.

In the parable that follows, the moneylender represents Jesus and the two debtors are the woman and Simon. The debt is the sense of sinfulness.

In verse 44 Jesus began his criticism of Simon. Perhaps Simon had turned his eyes away when he saw who she was. Jesus now commanded that Simon look at this woman whom he regarded as his inferior. Jesus told Simon that it was his (Simon's) duty, rather than that of the woman, to show the attentions and ordinary courtesies that should be given honored guests. Though Simon had not been rude, the treatment he had shown Jesus did not demonstrate any love. Jesus contrasted with his attitude the conduct of the woman, who loved much. Simon did not even give water; she gave tears.

We should not overlook a possible misinterpretation of this parable. It is clear from verse 47 that the woman was not forgiven because she loved much. This interpretation is directly opposite what the parable intends to teach. The parable shows that neither debtor had anything to pay. In the application to the woman, the forgiveness was free. It was because she was forgiven that she loved, not the reverse. Verse 50 also clearly shows that it was her faith that had saved her, not her love.

Bible Teaching About Forgiveness

In the Bible, the word forgiveness primarily refers to an act of God, though it has a secondary application to man's relationship to other men.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word used to express forgiveness conveys the idea of "to wipe away," "to remove," or "to send away." The Greek words in the New Testament are similar in meaning.

What, then, does forgiveness mean? Briefly, it means to give up (to wipe away or remove) the claim for compensation or retaliation, to put away resentment on account of an offense, not to require penalty for same wrong.

In the order of events, then, someone is offended. His natural response is retaliation, to "get even" with the other person. If he forgives the other person, he no longer has this desire for retaliation. He may still be hurt that the other person intended evil against him,

but he does not any longer desire to "get even."

In biblical terms, man offends God by sin. In this attitude of selfishness, he commits sins, in which he offends God and perhaps other persons as well. If he is a Christian, he feels guilty because of his sin and desires to correct his relationship to God. He does not want to live under the condemnation of God that follows unforgiven sin. He wants to remove the wall that separates him from God. Forgiveness is the means by which man renews his fellowship with God.

The notion of the forgiveness of sins goes far back into Israel's history. The prophets taught that the nation had often sinned and gone astray. Yet God was loving and merciful and gracious and was always willing to welcome his people back.

The other element of forgiveness that we have not come to is repentance. To repent means to resolve to change one's life as well as to change one's mind with regard to past conduct because of regret or dissatisfaction. We readily see that there is no point in asking to be forgiven unless one is truly sorry for what he has done. We may safely say, then, that without

repentance there is no forgiveness.

Many Christians have followed the New Testament teaching that it was man's sin that drove Jesus to the cross but that Jesus actually died as a sacrifice for the sins of all men — past, present, and future. Some have accepted this teaching literally; others have believed that its greatest value is symbolic.

Whatever view we may hold about the relationship of Jesus' death and forgiveness, we have many statements in the New Testament that help us understand the meaning and implications of repentance.

We have noted in previous lessons how both John the Baptist and Jesus called for repentance. Jesus believed that not only was repentance essential but that the holy will of God called for a complete reorientation of personality, effective when the Holy Spirit began to operate in the life of the believer.

We have also seen many episodes in which Jesus regarded the forgiveness of sins to be the first step in healing. When he assumed the power to forgive sins, the more strict Jews called his actions blasphemy.

A contemporary writer has said:

"Where sin as guilt is stressed, forgiveness appears in the context of atonement or expiation. Here it is seen as release from guilt, deliverance from anxiety and a burdened conscience, and recovery of peace with God. . . . The language of sacrifice is present not only in such expression as 'Lamb of God,' 'expiation,' and 'blood,' but also less directly in allusions to Christ's death 'for us' and 'for the ungodly.'

"Where sin is thought of as rebellion, forgiveness is given the context of reconciliation, and expresses the removal of enmity between man and God. Man's proud and rebellious spirit has turned him away from God, and only through acquiring a new heart and spirit can he find his way back to the source of life. What is impossible for man is possible to God, who offers his Son and sends his Spirit."

Barriers to Forgiveness

Our pattern of forgiving others is to be found in imitation of the attitude Jesus had toward those who hurt him. Jesus' ministry had begun with great popular support. Multitudes followed him. But at his trial, the

crowds called for the release of Barabbas, and their cry for Jesus was, "Crucify him!" How deeply Jesus must have been hurt! If he had felt vengeful toward the mob, we could certainly understand.

As he hung on the cross, only a few friendly faces were there to witness his suffering and to share it with him. Yet one of the last words from the cross was a word of forgiveness. (Luke 23:34)

What we should notice here is that Jesus did not await the asking for forgiveness before he granted it. It is the obligation of Christians to forgive every injury for which pardon is asked? Must repentance always be demonstrated before forgiveness can be granted? Must the Christian continue forgiving those who hurt him again and again?

Forgiveness becomes much easier for us to grant others if we think of our own need of forgiveness before God. In the Lord's Prayer we pray that God will forgive us as we have forgiven others. (See Matthew 6:12, 14-15.)

Look again at the illustrations at the beginning of this session. What do you think would be Jesus' counsel in each case?

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