

20:20 Vision Ministries – Devotions by Roger Browning
Week 26 (June 21-27, 2015)

God makes it clear that those of us who have received forgiveness from Him must also extend forgiveness to those who have wronged us. We will study passages related to the subject of forgiveness for the next few weeks.

Sunday, June 21 (read Luke 15:11-24)

*But while he was **still a long way off**, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. (Luke 15:20b, emphasis mine)*

Since today is Father's Day, I want you to read the entire Prodigal Son story. The younger son shows disrespect for his father (v. 11-16), but he later repents and makes plans to return home. He preplans his repentance speech before setting out on his homeward journey (v. 17-20a). The boy's father has every reason to be angry with his wayward son, but instead, he models love, compassion and forgiveness (v. 20b). He even disregards his own dignity and **runs** to his youngest offspring. The son gives part of his speech, but the father interrupts and throws his son a party with all the trimmings (v. 22-25). Best of all, he **forgives** his son and takes him back into his family. We'll see the rest of this story tomorrow.

Monday, June 22 (read Luke 15:25-32)

The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. (Luke 15:28)

I wish the story ended with v. 24 because it is such a wonderful illustration of forgiveness. The younger son is **set free** to start over again and the father is **set free** from worrying about his son's bad choices. However, the older son now comes into the story. He approaches the house and hears the sounds from the party. Upon inquiry, he learns that the celebration is in honor of his wayward sibling (v. 25-27). The older son pouts prompting the loving father to go out to try to deal with this anger and to plead with him to come to the celebration (v. 28). His older son claims to have been mistreated, as you will observe from his use of the words "**me**" and "**my**" (v. 29). He even calls the former prodigal "this son of yours" instead of "this brother of mine" (v. 30). The model father assures his older son that nothing has changed except that his lost brother has come home. What a difference it makes when we offer **forgiveness** instead of displaying angry **self-righteousness**!

Tuesday, June 23 (read Matthew 5:23-24)

Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:23-24)

I printed the entire passage to make sure that you don't miss the point. Before teaching us how we should give to the needy (6:1-4), Jesus teaches that **forgiving** is more important than any other form of giving. No matter how large your proposed gift is, God does not want to receive it until you extend **forgiveness** to your brother. This can be either a biological brother or a Christian brother. The Lord commands us to "First go and be reconciled to your brother." I sometimes ask my listeners to name the most important number to use in determining our offerings to God. The first answer they give me is "10," thinking I am preaching on the tithe. After that, some will say "100," because it all belongs to Him. The correct answer, as you can see, is "4." No gift is acceptable unless it is accompanied by **forgiveness**.

Wednesday, June 24 (read Matthew 6:9-15)

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. (Matthew 6:12)

This part of the Lord's Prayer is so important that Jesus amplifies it in v. 14-15. He wants to make sure that you understand the vital connection between **forgiving** and **being forgiven**. Do you really want the Lord to forgive your sins against Him in the same way that you forgive everyone who has wronged you? If not, you need to ask Him to help you to take seriously the lessons on forgiveness in the next few weeks of devotions. Read v. 14-15 over several times until you understand how serious your unforgiving attitude is to God and how it relates to your relationship with Him. Then fall on your knees (if you can) and ask Him to forgive your sin of refusing to forgive others.

Thursday, June 25 (read Mark 11:20-25)

And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins. (Mark 11:25)

This passage contains Peter's reaction to the cursing of the fig tree (v. 20-21). Jesus uses this moment to teach His disciples the vital connection between **forgiveness** and **prayer**. First He reminds them of the power they can have in prayer if only they will trust Him and have faith in His promises (v. 22-24). On the final night of His earthly ministry, the Lord repeats the promise in v. 24 seven times! In this setting, however, He connects the effectiveness of their prayers to their ability to forgive others who have hurt them (v. 25). This all makes perfect sense when we tie it all together. No one can come to the Father in prayer except for the fact that our sins are forgiven through His Son (John 14:6), but we cannot experience His forgiveness without having a willingness to forgive others (Matthew 6:12). What grudge are you carrying? Is it worth the price of separation from your God?

Friday, June 26 (read Colossians 3:12-14)

Forgive as the Lord forgave you. (Colossians 3:13b)

We are taught in Scripture to put off our old selves and to "clothe (ourselves) with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" (v. 12). Paul then commands us to "bear with each other and forgive whatever grievance (we) may have against one another." Some Christians seem to think it says, "Be a bear with one another!" If we are to let go of all our grievances, we must have an example. That's where today's printed verse comes into play. Jesus had every reason to hate His enemies, but He proclaims from the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). If our Lord can forgive those who crucified Him, don't you think we can forgive the misdeeds done against us? In order to accomplish this level of forgiveness, we must "put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity" (v. 14). Are you willing to follow God's Word in your actions and reactions toward others? In eternity, you'll be glad you did!

Saturday, June 27 (read Colossians 3:15-17)

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. (Colossians 3:15)

All the devotions this week lead us into a logical result, "peace with Christ." The printed verse tells us that this peace should "**rule** in your hearts" (emphasis mine). The word "rule" can relate to the work of an umpire; in other words, let His peace make every call when it comes to your dealings with others. I am beginning to understand and experience what it means to "let the peace of God rule" and "the Word of Christ dwell" in my heart (v. 16). What a difference it makes when I remember that God is in control of everything and everybody that comes into my life. I don't even need to get upset about the type of music we use in our church, because God loves it all when it is sung from our hearts to Him (v. 16). I want you to join me in seeking to do everything with a thankful attitude while giving all glory to Him (v. 17). Then, and only then, will the "peace of God rule in (our) hearts!"