

## Forgiveness Is Your Business

The other day I was out in Richmond shopping when I heard one girl say to another. “Girl, I’m gonna buy you a box of business so, when you want to get into some business, you’ll have some of your own.”

This week’s scripture lessons are all about what’s “your business” and what isn’t. Paul’s letter to the Romans is all about diversity of peoples, cultures, traditions, and rules. Paul was raised a Jew but considers his mission the proclaiming of Jesus’ Gospel so all that hear him can understand. He wants to education the Jews of the foreign territories that while, yes, they are the chosen ones, they are not the only ones God loves and cares for. He covers a lot of ground talking about some only eat certain foods or only worship on particular days. He asks us to be gentle and to try to find the things we have in common rather than dissect every word and action looking for something to challenge.

<sup>10-12</sup> So where does that leave you when you criticize a brother? And where does that leave you when you condescend to a sister? I’d say it leaves you looking pretty silly—or worse. Eventually, we’re all going to end up kneeling side by side in the place of judgment, facing God. Your critical and condescending ways aren’t going to improve your position there one bit.

Matthew takes up another “practice” we need to strengthen so that we can look at others with less critical eyes and still maintain the integrity of the group, Jesus has already told Peter that he, Peter, will be the rock upon

which he, Jesus, will build the church. Peter is probably mulling over all the rules and the new things people are bringing to the gathering and wondering how he is to mediate differences in the coming years.

He takes a deep breath and asks, “Jesus, how many times should we forgive an offender – seven times seven?” He most likely thinks he’s being very generous. Jesus responds, “No, Peter, not seven times seven but seventy times seventy!”

As he often does, Jesus proceeds to explain with a parable.

“The kingdom of God is like a king who decided to square accounts with his servants. As he got under way, one servant was brought before him who had run up a debt of a hundred thousand dollars. He couldn’t pay up, so the king ordered the man, along with his wife, children, and goods, to be auctioned off at the slave market.

<sup>26-27</sup> “The poor wretch threw himself at the king’s feet and begged, ‘Give me a chance and I’ll pay it all back.’ Touched by his plea, the king let him off, erasing the debt.

<sup>28</sup> “The servant was no sooner out of the room when he came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him ten dollars. He seized him by the throat and demanded, ‘Pay up. Now!’

29-31 "The poor wretch threw himself down and begged, 'Give me a chance and I'll pay it all back.' But he wouldn't do it. He had him arrested and put in jail until the debt was paid. When the other servants saw this going on, they were outraged and brought a detailed report to the king.

32-35 "The king summoned the man and said, 'You evil servant! I forgave your entire debt when you begged me for mercy. Shouldn't you be compelled to be merciful to your fellow servant who asked for mercy?' The king was furious and put the screws to the man until he paid back his entire debt. And that's exactly what my Father in heaven is going to do to each one of you who doesn't forgive unconditionally anyone who asks for mercy."

The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary states that "whoever counts has not forgiven at all, but is only biding his or her time. The kind of forgiveness called for is beyond calculation. . ." God has forgiven each one of us so many times that they can't counted either. This is God's grace.

We all struggle when someone offends us or hurts our sensibilities. We think, "I didn't kill anyone or steal anything." Maybe not literally but figuratively we may have killed their spirit or stolen their confidence. Then, of course, there are those "truly evil" such as Hitler or other mass murderers. Should we really forgive them? As odd as it may sound, yes, we should forgive. You see if we don't then we are holding ourselves up as God. Only God knows all the wherefores and whys. Only God knows all

history. Another thing we must consider. If we don't turn it over to God through forgiveness, the trauma sits in our souls until we wither away from the inside out. Forgiveness is NOT condoning – it's turning the problem over to God. The third thing to be considered is what happens when we DO forgive.

Some people say "Forgive and forget". Like forgiveness miraculously wipes all memory of whatever bad thing has happened right out of our minds and lives. NOT SO. We will probably remember whatever forever – the difference is that it will no longer dominate our emotions and energies. Spiritually, we are set free to love and show mercy to others as well as ourselves.

As I live and breathe," God says,  
"every knee will bow before me;  
Every tongue will tell the honest truth  
that I and only I am God."

So mind your own business. You've got your hands full just taking care of your own life before God. And remember: Forgiveness is your business!

Praise be to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, now and forever more! Amen.

**14** Welcome with open arms fellow believers who don't see things the way you do. And don't jump all over them every time they do or say something you don't agree with—even when it seems that they are strong on opinions but weak in the faith department. Remember, they have their own history to deal with. Treat them gently.

<sup>2-4</sup> For instance, a person who has been around for a while might well be convinced that he can eat anything on the table, while another, with a different background, might assume he should only be a vegetarian and eat accordingly. But since both are guests at Christ's table, wouldn't it be terribly rude if they fell to criticizing what the other ate or didn't eat? God, after all, invited them both to the table. Do you have any business crossing people off the guest list or interfering with God's welcome? If there are corrections to be made or manners to be learned, God can handle that without your help.

<sup>5</sup> Or, say, one person thinks that some days should be set aside as holy and another thinks that each day is pretty much like any other. There are good reasons either way. So, each person is free to follow the convictions of conscience.

<sup>6-9</sup> What's important in all this is that if you keep a holy day, keep it for *God's* sake; if you eat meat, eat it to the glory of God and thank God for prime rib; if you're a vegetarian, eat vegetables to the glory of God and thank God for broccoli. None of us are permitted to insist on our own way in these matters. It's *God* we are answerable to—all the way from life to death and everything in between—not each other. That's why Jesus lived and died and then lived again: so that he could be our Master across the entire range of life and death, and free us from the petty tyrannies of each other.

<sup>10-12</sup> So where does that leave you when you criticize a brother? And where does that leave you when you condescend to a sister? I'd say it leaves you looking pretty silly—or worse. Eventually, we're all going to end up kneeling side by side in the place of judgment, facing God. Your critical and condescending ways aren't going to improve your position there one bit. Read it for yourself in Scripture:

"As I live and breathe," God says,  
"every knee will bow before me;  
Every tongue will tell the honest truth  
that I and only I am God."

So mind your own business. You've got your hands full just taking care of your own life before God.

**The Message (MSG)** Copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson

<sup>21</sup> At that point Peter got up the nerve to ask, "Master, how many times do I forgive a brother or sister who hurts me? Seven?"

<sup>22</sup> Jesus replied, "Seven! Hardly. Try seventy times seven.

<sup>23-25</sup> "The kingdom of God is like a king who decided to square accounts with his servants. As he got under way, one servant was brought before him who had run up a debt of a hundred thousand dollars. He couldn't pay up, so the king ordered the man, along with his wife, children, and goods, to be auctioned off at the slave market.

<sup>26-27</sup> "The poor wretch threw himself at the king's feet and begged, 'Give me a chance and I'll pay it all back.' Touched by his plea, the king let him off, erasing the debt.

<sup>28</sup> "The servant was no sooner out of the room when he came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him ten dollars. He seized him by the throat and demanded, 'Pay up. Now!'

<sup>29-31</sup> "The poor wretch threw himself down and begged, 'Give me a chance and I'll pay it all back.' But he wouldn't do it. He had him arrested and put in jail until the debt was paid. When the other servants saw this going on, they were outraged and brought a detailed report to the king.

<sup>32-35</sup> "The king summoned the man and said, 'You evil servant! I forgave your entire debt when you begged me for mercy. Shouldn't you be compelled to be merciful to your fellow servant who asked for mercy?' The king was furious and put the screws to the man until he paid back his entire debt. And that's exactly what my Father in heaven is going to do to each one of you who doesn't forgive unconditionally anyone who asks for mercy."