

Doing Our Job Well

Video Clip: MPT *Loss of Faith*

We just saw a man who's going through tremendous pain and hurt in his life. What if he were your friend? What if he was your uncle or your cousin? What would you say to him? How would help him navigate through the anger and the sense of loss? How would you answer his all consuming question: If there's a God why didn't He stop the attack before it ever started?

That's a good question, isn't it? How do we maintain our faith in the face of such blatant evil?

Obviously God could have blinded the hijackers. He could have confused their thoughts. God could have struck them dead before they ever got a chance to carry out their plans.

God could have, but He didn't. God has obviously chosen not to stop all the sin and the evil in the world.

For those who understandably wrestle with why God doesn't stop evil, there's an important question to consider.

That crucial question is: If God was going to stop evil in the world, what's the cut off point? If God was going to strike people down for evil behavior what's the criterion for who gets struck down and who doesn't?

When we're dealing with wicked people using airplanes as weapons it's easy. We think, "Strike them down before they can carry out their plans."

What about rapists and child molesters? Easy choice. "Vaporize them before they damage someone for life."

But then what about the less obvious behavior? When I was a young person I didn't know the Lord and I hurt my parents profoundly. Even after I became a believer I didn't follow God at first and through a series of selfish choices I wounded people who loved me to the point where their world seemed to turn upside down.

I have done evil things in my life. And so have you.

Should God make everyone a thoughtless, robot? Should we be like androids that are programmed to behave in a certain way? I don't know anyone who would vote for that idea. Obviously God didn't make us like that.

We have wills, we're not puppets on a string.

So what about the evil that we do? What about those hurtful things in our lives that we would go back and change if we only could?

If God were to eliminate all evil from the world it would be a real quiet place around here because there wouldn't be any people left!

The Bible puts it this way: Ec 7:20 *...there is not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin.* Ro 3:23 *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...*

Evil starts in the heart. God has given us a free will. Sinners sometimes exercise that free will in terribly destructive ways.

The truth is God knows about the pain and hurt in the most personal of ways. His own Son came to take the awfulness of sin upon Himself. Our salvation comes because God got down in the middle of the violence and hatred of our world. God entered into our pain.

He doesn't keep it all from happening to us. He didn't keep it all from happening to Himself.

God was faithful to us to provide the perfect sacrifice for our sin. Because of that God calls all who have trusted Him to be faithful to him.

We're to be faithful to Him, recognizing the potential of our own sinful behavior.
We're to be faithful to Him, recognizing the potential of the sinful behavior of others.

What does He want us to do? What are His requirements for us?

Luke 17 pg 1013

I want us to see 4 of God's requirements for Christians living in a sinful world.

I. It's Our Responsibility Not to Cause Offenses. Read vs 1 & 2

Jesus starts off this teaching with an unavoidable reality. "Offences are going to come." If your reading in NASB you'll notice that the translators rendered it, *It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come...*

The word translated "offences" or "stumbling blocks" is a very picturesque one. It's the word *skandalon* in Greek. Our English word "scandal" is derived from this word.

Literally in Greek, *skandalon* referred to a deathtrap which was baited so that, when the bait is touched, the stick holding the bait springs the trap.

The Book of James explains: *...each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.*

Sin doesn't lead to life. Sin promises that we'll really enjoy life if we jump into it. Sin makes a lot of promises, but it doesn't deliver. What it really, ultimately brings is pain, heartache, dejection, and death.

Notice what Jesus is saying here. "There are going to be death traps. We can't get away from it."

Larry Sarver has written: I could paraphrase what Jesus is saying like this, "Things that trip people up spiritually speaking are inevitable." There will always be things that will cause people to lose faith in God, become neglectful in obedience to God, and stunt spiritual growth. The spiritual stumbling blocks, these negative influences are bound to come.

We cannot avoid this truth in a fallen world but Jesus wants us to make sure that our lives, behaviors, and attitudes are not part of the problem. This is why Jesus says, "Watch yourselves" and "Woe to the person through whom they come."

Jesus obviously has the Pharisees in mind here. They were the religious ones whose religion had degenerated into empty ritual and a twisting of God's truth.

This whole section of scripture started with the Pharisees criticizing Jesus for reaching out to sinful people. Their attitude was, "Stay away from the riff-raff. We're the godly ones. Everyone should be like us."

In a real sense they were a stumbling block to others. They were making it difficult for others to find God.

We have a responsibility not to cause offenses. In fact, if we trip other people up spiritually, If we cause others to stumble from finding God and His truth it would be better if we weren't even around.

It would be better for the one who causes the offence to have a big heavy grinding wheel from a grain mill tied around his neck and be thrown into the sea.

Do you get the idea that this is a serious issue with Jesus?

We tend to think, "How I live is my business. I'm not my brother's keeper." God says, "No one lives to himself..." Every one of us has a responsibility to others.

We have a responsibility to those who haven't trusted Christ. That responsibility is to not to stand in their way of their finding God.

We have a responsibility to one another too. Not to cause a brother or sister to stumble.

I. It's Our Responsibility Not to Cause Offenses.

*II. It's Our Responsibility to Forgive Offenders. **Read vs 3***

C. S. Lewis wrote: *We all agree that forgiveness is a beautiful idea until we have to practice it.*

Any counselor, Christian or otherwise, will tell you that the number 1 issue they deal with in peoples' lives is bitterness, unresolved anger, lack of forgiveness.

It's like a millstone. It's like a ball and chain. It robs us of vitality - of the ability to deal with life itself. Unforgiveness can color every thing we think say and do till we loose all perspective. It will rob us of peace, joy, and contentment.

Notice the command of Jesus; 1. If some one sins against you, take action. Don't go to your friends. Don't go to your spouse. Don't go to your coworkers. Go to the person who sinned against you.

Jesus dosen't give us all the details here but He does in Matthew 18 so lets look there for a moment. (We'll be back) **Matthew 18 pg 953**

Read 15-17

The goal of Matthew 18 is restoration. God's goal for our relationships is always restoration. Notice, what your trying to do is "gain your brother."

You're not there to beat him up. Your'e there to mend a broken relationship when someone has sinned against you.

God's plan is that we go through the process trying to keep things at the lowest possible level.

If we've sinned against someone the Bible says we're to go to that person and seek to be reconciled to them. If some one sins against us we're to go to the person and seek to be reconciled. The responsibility to go is always ours.

Back to Luke 17

When Jesus says, "If your brother sins against you rebuke him..." He dosen't mean attack him. He means be honest, open and seek for reconciliation.

If your brother recognizes he's done wrong and seeks your forgiveness, your responsibility is to forgive.

Obviously the question would come to mind, is there limits to this forgiveness thing? Jesus anticipates that question and here's what He says: **Read 4**

Now obviously this is a bit of hyperbole. (huper - above & ballow - to cast: to pile it on for emphasis) No one would come back 7 times a day to seek forgiveness. But the point is well taken. Forgiveness has no limits.

I don't know about you, but that one really sets me back. Jesus has some amazing things to say in the Gospels and this is right up there at the top of the list.

- I. *It's Our Responsibility Not to Cause Offenses.*
- II. *It's Our Responsibility to Forgive Offenders.*
- III. *It's our Responsibility to Use the Faith We Have.* **Read vs 5**

Can you identify with that? I can. I understand exactly how the disciples were feeling, because that exactly how I feel when I read Jesus' words.

No wonder Jesus own disciples, who had traveled with Him for almost three years still said, "Increase our faith."

Now here's the answer: **Read vs 6**

The mustard seed was proverbially small. Several places in rabbinical writings you find the phrase "the size of a mustard seed." The roots of the mulberry are proverbially deep and hard to dislodge. It was thought that the tree could stand 600 years in the earth.

So Jesus combines these two proverbial ideas and says, with the very tiniest faith you are able to uproot the most tenacious tree and plant it, and make it grow where no tree can possibly grow.

In other words forgiveness is hard. Jesus acknowledges that it can be like a tree who's roots are deep and tenacious. But as believers if we use the faith we already have we can do it.

In Matthew 18 Jesus gives a parable. He says a servant was in debt for millions of dollars. He was unable to pay. He asked his master for more time and *Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.*

But then that servant went out and found a man who owed him \$75.00. The guy couldn't pay up so he had him thrown in debtor's prison.

When the master found out what had happened he was livid. He said to his servant, "Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?"

The point of the parable is this:

A holy, righteous God graciously forgives our debt of sin because of Jesus Christ. if we fail to forgive others, we've made a mockery of what God has done for us.

If we can believe that we're forgiven of our sin debt before the almighty God of the universe then we have enough faith to forgive someone who's wronged us.

It's not that we need a greater amount of faith. It's that we need to utilize the faith we already have.

- I. *It's Our Responsibility Not to Cause Offenses.*
- II. *It's Our Responsibility to Forgive Offenders.*
- III. *It's our Responsibility to Use the Faith We Have.*

IV. *It's our Responsibility to Act In Obedience*

Read vs 7-9

What's the point of this parable? Why does Jesus include it with His teaching on forgiveness?

Remember this was written in a day when Rome ruled the world and the Romans used people as slaves. Slavery would have been something that all of Jesus disciples would have understood.

He says this: "Suppose you had a slave." (Obviously they wouldn't, but they understood what He was talking about.)

Suppose you had a slave who was out in your field working. When he came in after a tiring day of labor, you wouldn't say, "Sit down here and let me make you dinner."

The master would say, "Fix my dinner, and when your finished serving me you can eat."

Does the master thank the slave for fixing his dinner? No way. That's the slaves job. He was only doing what was required.

Now look at the application: read vs 10

It is our responsibility to act in obedience by forgiving. there's no pat on the back. There's no "What a wonderful person we are for forgiving others." We are servants who have done what was our duty to do.

Let me make a couple of observations here:

1. *Forgiveness is not a feeling.* In fact, sometimes it can be just the opposite of our feelings.

When the slave came in from the field he felt tired and hungary. While he cooked his masters meal he felt like feeding himself and letting his master get his own food. But he did his job.

God commands us to forgive. Forgiveness is a response to an command of God, not a response to a feeling. Forgiveness is an action.

God can not and does not command us to show feelings. We can't manufacture feelings. What God can and does command is obedience.

Let me give this definition of forgiveness: Forgiveness is a promise to the other person that you won't bring up their transgression again.

It's promising, I won't bring up your transgression to you to use as a weapon in the next argument because I Cor 13:5 says *"Love keeps no record of wrongs suffered..."*

It's promising I won't bring up your sin to others. I won't gossip to my friends because Eph 4:29 *Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.*

And the third aspect of the promise is the hardest of all. It's promising that I won't bring up your transgression to myself.

So many times we want to keep that other person's offence going in our thoughts. We relive it over and over again. It's what AA calls, "Playing the old tapes."

True forgiveness can make the promise.

2. *Forgiveness is not pretending that you weren't hurt or saying that the other person didn't do wrong.*

The very fact of forgiveness is needed validates the fact that an offence took place.

3. *Forgiveness isn't a promise that you'll immediately start trusting the other person.*

Forgiveness is based on grace. Trust is earned.

When we receive Christ as our Savior God immediately forgives us, but He works over time to bring about maturity before He entrusts us with spiritual responsibility.

Remember Luke 16:10? Jesus said it Himself: *He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.*

Trust must come through experience. Forgiveness is a command that can be carried out at any time.

4. Forgiveness is not relieving other people of their responsibility.

Our thinking usually goes this way: “That person really hurt or offended me. If I forgive them they’re walking away scott-free.”

We want to make sure they’re held liable for their actions.

Listen; forgiveness doesn’t relieve the person of their responsibility for their actions. You can’t do that. You can’t do that, because they’re responsible to God.

A major step in the process of forgiveness is releasing the person who hurt us, giving up control of revenge and retribution. In a sense, cancelling out the debt owed to us, and committing them into the hands of God.

Listen to this command: Eph 4:32 *And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.*

We are to forgive as God has forgiven us.

How has God forgiven us?

The Bible tells us:

a. God was ready to forgive while we were still His enemy Rom 5:8 *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

God was ready to forgive before we were ready to ask.

b. God forgives out of his mercy and grace, not because we deserve His forgiveness. Eph 2:4-7 *But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

c. God’s forgiveness costs Him very much. It costs us nothing. The next 2 verses in that Ephesians passage say: *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

It didn’t cost us anything to purchase our salvation. It doesn’t cost the person we forgive.

You know who it costs?

If God bore the pain of our forgiveness, we bear the pain of the forgiveness of the other person. We want them to pay. God calls us to pay the price of obedience to Him.

d. God forgives by promising not to remember our wrongs. Isa 43:25 *I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; And I will not remember your sins.*

You say, "Well that may be OK for God, but I can't forget." Either can God forget. He's omniscient. He knows everything. He doesn't forget, He chooses not to remember.

He makes us a promise. Remember we said Biblical forgiveness is a promise. Listen to God's promise:

Psalm 103:12 *As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.*

Isaiah 38:17 ... *You have lovingly delivered my soul from the pit of corruption, For You have cast all my sins behind Your back.*

Micah 7:19 ... *You will cast all our sins Into the depths of the sea.*

If we've been hurt we can't just forget that hurt. What we can do is promise not to bring it up again. We can cease to charge the guilt of that other person's sin to their account.

By God's grace we are to forgive.

Corrie Ten Boom was a Christian living in Holland in the 1940's. Her family hid Jews from the Nazis and were discovered. The family was sent to concentration camps. Her father and sister died in the death camps, but Corrie led Bible studies using a pocket NT she obtained from a prison worker.

Her barracks, barracks 28, became known throughout the camp as 'the crazy place, where they hope.'

Corrie survived Ravensbruck and years later she found herself speaking in a meeting about God's mercy and power. After that meeting an elderly man walked up to her and put out his hand.

Immediately feelings of anger and rage welled up in her heart. She was face to face with a guard from the prison camp. She recognized him immediately. She would never forget his face.

He has caused so many people death and destruction.

He said "I have become a believer in Jesus Christ and I'm asking you to forgive me."

She writes, "At first I stood there--and could not. My sister had died in that place--could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking?"

It could not have been many seconds that he stood there, hand held out, but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do.

I had to do it--I knew that. Still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. "Jesus, help me!" I prayed silently. "I can lift my hand. I can do that much."

And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

"I forgive you, brother!" I cried. "With all my heart!"

For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then."

Forgiveness is a matter of obedience. An act of the will.
We obey but God makes it a matter of our heart.

*We have a Responsibility Not to Cause Offenses,
to Forgive Offenders,
to Use the Faith We Have,
and to Act In Obedience to God.*