

=THE CHRISTIAN LIFE=

Lesson 1
Forgiveness

AIM: to teach my pupils to forgive.

POINT OF CONTACT: Ask the pupils to relate a time when forgiveness was sweet—maybe as a child when Mother forgave, as a youth when a sweetheart forgave, the forgiveness of an estranged friend, and certainly, the time of forgiveness of sin, better still, the many times sin has been forgiven. Perhaps several pupils can start the lesson off by briefly relating such times.

- I. WHAT IS FORGIVENESS? In the New Testament the word “forgiveness” means to “send away.” It comes from two words: “apo” which means “from” and “hiemi” which means “to send.” The sin itself is sent away. The broken fellowship is sent away, and the punishment is sent away. All of this is implied in forgiveness.

The word for forgiveness is also translated “completely canceled.”

It also signifies the remission of the punishment due to sinful conduct, or delivering the sinner from the penalty. It means not only restoration of fellowship because of an act committed but deliverance from the penalty involved.

Forgiveness also implies the complete removal of the cause of offense. It is closely akin to the Bible word “justification,” which means God pronounces the sinner blameless “just as if he had never sinned.”

Here is a good illustration: All of the words for forgiveness perhaps point back to the scapegoat of the Old Testament. See Leviticus 16:5-10. In the seventh month (October) of the year and the tenth day of that month two goats were taken. One was killed. His blood was sprinkled on the other goat (the scapegoat). The sins of the people were confessed over him, and he was led away into a wilderness never to return. The goat which died points to Jesus’ bearing our sins. The living goat (the scapegoat) points to His carrying our sins away never to be returned again. Here is a beautiful picture of forgiveness. Of course, it is all because of the blood that Christ has forgiven us. Because of that same blood (the fact that Christ has forgiven us) we ought to forgive each other.

Not far from New York City is a grave. On the headstone of that grave there is only one word written: “forgiven.” There is no art work, just the word “forgiven.” There is no epitaph, just the word “forgiven.” There is no explanation, just the word “forgiven.” There is no name, just the word “forgiven.” There is no eulogy, just the word “forgiven.” There is a place over which God has written the word “forgiven.” It is Calvary. Because of Calvary, we are forgiven, and because of Calvary, we are to forgive.

- II. WHY SHOULD WE FORGIVE? Read Matthew 18:23-35. Here is a beautiful story of why we should forgive. A servant owed his king 10,000 talents. A talent of gold was approximately \$30,000. If the servant owed the king gold, he owed him \$300,000,000. A talent of silver was approximately \$2,000. If he owed him in silver, he owed him \$20,000,000. The Greco-Roman talent was valued at approximately \$1,000. If this is what the servant owed the king, he owed him \$10,000,000. He came before the king and asked for forgiveness, and the king granted it! What compassion!

The aforementioned servant had a fellow servant who owed him 100 pence. (Probably the word here for pence is “denarius,” which was worth about 17¢.) Consequently, his fellow servant owed him \$17. His fellow servant asked forgiveness, and he who had just been forgiven of at least a \$10,000,000 debt would not forgive his fellow servant of the \$17 debt. The teaching here is that if God could forgive us, we ought to forgive one another. Our sins against God are likened to the \$10,000,000. The sins of those who have sinned against us are likened to the \$17. Certainly, anyone who has been forgiven by God should forgive his fellow servants. Hence, we forgive because Jesus has forgiven us.

We are also to forgive because it is Christlike to forgive. We are told to rejoice because we are forgiven. We are told that the man who is forgiven of his sins is a blessed or happy man. It is infinitely greater, however, to forgive than to be forgiven. It is not Christlike to be forgiven, for Christ never needed forgiveness. He Who knew no sin did not need forgiveness of sin. It is, however, Christlike to forgive. Remember the words of our Lord on the cross spoken to those who were punishing Him, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do," Luke 23:34a.

III. HOW OFTEN ARE WE TO FORGIVE? See Matthew 18:21, 22. Notice, we are to forgive "seventy times seven." That means 490 times; however, seven is God's number of perfection or completion. This means we are to continue to forgive. There are seven days in the week, seven colors in the rainbow, and seven notes on the scale. When one seven ends, another seven begins. God is saying we are to keep on forgiving until we get in the habit of forgiving. In other words, forgiveness is to become a part of our character, a part of our way of life, a regular habit. (Teacher, take some time here to mock or mimic some little sin. Have one member of the class to call another one "a bum." Have the other one say, "You're forgiven." Have this done over and over again until the first person says, "You're a bum!" and the other says, "You're forgiven," then, "You're a bum!" "You're forgiven," etc. Show how easy it is to get in the habit of doing the same thing. This is what God is telling us to do. We ought to continue forgiving without measure.)

IV. WHAT ARE WE TO FORGIVE? There are several words associated with forgiveness in the New Testament.

1. We are to forgive trespasses. This means that folks who infringe upon us, who trespass against us, are to be forgiven.
2. We are to forgive debts.
3. We are to forgive evil thoughts of the heart.
4. We are to forgive sins.

Each of the above words is associated with forgiveness in the Bible. In other words, we are to forgive those who owe us, those who trespass against us or our property, those who sin against us, and those who say and speak evil of us. Once one has tasted of the heavenly manna of forgiveness he will never be satisfied with the garbage and leftovers of vindication, vengeance, and retaliation.

Brother Hyles often said, "I would rather be the hated than the hater, the criticized than the critic, the cursed than the curser." Oh, to learn to forgive all, all the time!

V. PROMISES TO FORGIVERS. God has promised to forgive forgivers. In Matthew 6:12 we read, "...forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." In Matthew 6:15 we are told, "But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." In Matthew 18:35 we find, "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one..." In Mark 11:25 we are told to "...forgive, if ye have aught against any..." Then in Colossians 3:13 the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle to write, "...as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." Hence, God promises forgiveness to the forgiver. What a deal!

Our sins are likened unto a minimum of \$10,000,000. Sins against us are likened to approximately \$17. Now suppose someone owes you \$17 and you owe someone \$10,000,000. An offer is made that if you forget the \$17, another will forget your \$10,000,000. Wow! What a bargain! No person should ever pass up that! God says He will forgive forgivers. If I can forgive the fellowservant of \$17, God will forgive me of \$10,000,000. No one can beat that!

VI. QUOTES CONCERNING FORGIVENESS:

“Every person should have a special cemetery lot in which to bury the faults of friends and loved ones.”
Anonymous

“The best way to get even is to forget.” Anonymous

“A small boy repeating the Lord’s Prayer one evening prayed, ‘And forgive us our debts as we forgive those who are dead against us.’” Anonymous

“He who forgives ends the quarrel.” African proverb

“It is the prince’s part to pardon.” Sir Francis Bacon

“It requires only an ounce of grace and thimbleful of brains to hold a grudge, but to entirely forget an injury is truly beautiful.” The Defender

“The noblest revenge is to forgive.” Thomas Fuller

“Forgiveness is the most necessary and proper work of every man; for though, when I do not a just thing, or a charitable, or a wise, another man may do it for me, yet no man can forgive my enemy but myself.”
Edward Herbert

“He who has not forgiven an enemy has never yet tasted one of the most sublime enjoyments of life.”
Johann Kaspar Lavater

“A wise man will make haste to forgive because he knows the true value of time and will not suffer it to pass away an unnecessary pain.” Samuel Johnson

“Humanity is never so beautiful as when...forgiving another.” Jean Paul Richter

“Only the brave know how to forgive; it is the most refined and generous pitch of virtue that human nature can arrive at. A coward never forgave; it is not in his nature.” Laurence Sterne

“I pardon him as God shall pardon me.” William Shakespeare

“We win by tenderness; we conquer by forgiveness.” Frederick Robertson

- VII. WHO SHOULD LEAD IN FORGIVENESS? See Matthew 5:23, 24. Notice the words in verse 23, “...And there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee.” You will see that the offended, not the offender, is to seek reconciliation. We normally say, “I will forgive him if he will ask me.” This is not the Bible plan. God, realizing that the one who has been offended is the stronger of the two, and knowing that it is best for the stronger to seek reconciliation, admonishes that the one sinned against be reconciled to his brother. The one who is a sinner is the weaker. He will not as likely seek reconciliation as the one who is sinned against. Hence, the burden of reconciliation is on the one who has been wronged, not the one who has wronged. Because God made it this way, reconciliation is more easily effected, for the stronger will more likely display forgiveness than the weaker. (Teacher, have some child in the class gossip about another or do wrong against another. Then ask the class which is to seek reconciliation. Let them know in no uncertain terms that both should seek reconciliation, but since the stronger is more likely to do so and more likely to obey God, God commands him to initiate the proceedings.)

CONCLUSION: Teacher, discuss with the class times in the life of Christ when He was forgiving. Of course, one time was on the cross when He said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." His forgiveness of Peter after he had cursed and denied the Lord was another. In Matthew 9:2 He forgave the man sick of the palsy. In Luke 7:48 He forgave the lady who was a sinner who brought an alabaster box of ointment, stood at Jesus' feet behind Him weeping, washed His feet with tears, wiped them with the hairs of her head, kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment. See how many times the class can find forgiveness in the life of Christ.