

GLAD TIDINGS

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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MUST I FORGIVE?

Jerry Fite

The Greek word translated “*forgive*” denotes the action of “sending forth”, “leaving” or “letting go”. When God forgives us our sins, He sends forth, or dismisses our transgressions against Him. What a blessing to have his complete forgiveness: “*As far as the east is from the west, So far hath He removed our transgressions from us*” (Psalm 103:12). We all desire God’s forgiveness. But, must I forgive others? Does God expect me to automatically forgive my fellow man every time he does me wrong?

Jesus impresses upon our minds the fact that God will not forgive us of our sins if we will not forgive others. “*For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your father forgive your trespasses*” (Matthew 6:13-14). In the context of praying to God for Him to forgive me of my sins, Jesus makes my forgiving others a necessary condition.

Through the illustrative parable of the two debtors, Jesus makes me put my self in the pic-

ture of one owing much to my Lord, but not willing to forgive one who owes me much less. The Lord says to me, “Thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt...shouldest not thou also have had mercy on thy fellow servant, even as I had mercy on thee?” (Matthew 18:33-34). If we do not forgive others, we will be in the position of having “*to pay all that was due*” to our Lord. “*So shall also my heavenly father do unto you, if ye forgive not every one his brother from your hearts*” (Matthew 18:35).

While we must forgive others, it does not occur unconditionally. First there must be “*repentance*” on the part of the one who has sinned against us. Jesus awakes us to responsibilities we have towards others: “*Take heed to yourselves: if thy brother sin, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he sin against thee seven times in the day, and seven times turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him*” (Luke 17:3-4). When one repents, we are to forgive. Even if in one day our brother sins against us seven times, we are to forgive. But notice the necessary condition: only if “*seven times*” he turns

again “*saying, I repent*” are we to “*forgive him*” seven times.

“*Seven times*” or “*seventy times seven*” (Matthew 18:22) is not setting the limit of forgiveness up to 490 times, but manifesting that we should *always* forgive those who sin against us. But our forgiveness should pattern the way God forgives us: with a tender heart (Ephesians 4:32); when we “*repent*” (Acts 8:22).

As we wait for sinners to repent, we should manifest a heart willing and ready to forgive. The father was looking to receive the errant son back again before the son confessed his wrongs to the father (Luke 15:20-21). Wisdom from above demands that one be “*easily entreated*” or ready to be persuaded with the demands for peace (James 3:17).

Explicitly, God commands us to forgive others when they repent, or He will not forgive us. Implicitly, God’s wisdom infers that we should always be ready to forgive. We must always forgive as God forgives.