

Glad Tidings

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

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Forgiveness

(Jerry Fite)

Upon the commandment of their now deceased father, the sons of Jacob asked Joseph, “...we pray thee, forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of thy father” (Genesis 50:17). No doubt the years of living with the injustice done unto him now surfaced emotionally as Joseph “wept when they spake unto him”.

Joseph calmed their fears by saying he did not stand in the place of God. In fact, he could now see the providential hand of God behind their act and his consequent pain. He says, “And as for you, ye meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring to pass as it is this day, to save much people alive” (Genesis 50:20). As for himself personally, he says, “...fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones.” He then “comforted them, and spake kindly unto them” (Genesis 50:21).

Would Joseph be so willing to forgive his brothers if he did not see God’s providential hand in bringing about good through his pain? Would you? If you can only feel the pain of one’s injustice to you, and see no good that has occurred since the

transgression, can you forgive the transgressor when they ask for your forgiveness? Should you? Must you?

We should always be willing to forgive. But God demands we forgive the wrong doer only when he or she repents. Jesus says, “Take heed to yourselves: if thy brother sin, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him” (Luke 17:3). When sin occurs, it is not to be dealt with lightly. We should rebuke the sin in our brother. We might wait in hope, ready to repent, but we are not to forgive when there is no repentance. God does not forgive unconditionally, without repentance (Acts 8:22). We should follow His lead. For “...even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye” (Colossians 3:13).

Must we forgive others? Jesus said, “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 6:14-15). If we are to receive God’s forgiveness, we must extend forgiveness to others.

Jesus spoke a parable teaching the necessity of for-

giveness where one’s Lord forgives him of his enormous debt, but he in turn, refuses to forgive his fellow servant a debt of far less monetary value (Matthew 18:23-35). When the servant is not willing to forgive the little debt owed him, His Lord is unwilling to forgive him of his great debt. Is this not where we find ourselves before God? We have someone who has sinned one time against us and asks for our forgiveness. Do we refuse to forgive him or her? Yet, we have sinned far more against God, and desire His forgiveness of our many sins. What will God do with us? “And his Lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors. So shall also my heavenly Father do unto you...” (Matthew 18:34-35).

When Peter asked Jesus, “how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Until seven times?” (Matthew 17:21); Jesus replies, “I say not unto thee, until seven times; but until seventy times seven” (Matthew 17:22). Jesus does not want us to focus on the number of seven or the literal number of four hundred ninety times, but wants us to focus on always forgiving the penitent person who asks for our forgiveness. Forgive, or forfeit forgiveness from God!