

27. Justice to them, but mercy to me

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A long time ago, there were a couple of brothers who get their sheep by stealing other people's sheep in Indiana. They got caught red handed by local ranchers one day.

That was the time the punishment from neighbors was more severe than the law. The ranchers made a branding iron for them with the letters, "ST" - stands for "Sheep Thief" and they stamped on the brothers' foreheads, so that anyone see them would notice "ST" on their foreheads.

One of the brothers got bitter and left the town and went into a big city and became a true low life. He ended up in a ditch with a knife on his back. But the other brother repented from his crime and decided that he would make up his bad past by serving and helping the people in the town. Many, many years passed by, the good brother got old and became the most respected and loved man in the town.

A reporter from the state capital newspaper company came to the town and met this remarkable man. After the interview, the reporter asked one of the townspeople, "I've noticed the mark of the two letters on his forehead, what is that for?" The townner scratched his head and replied, "I don't know where he got it, but I think it stands for 'Saint'".

In this story, time allowed forgiveness to happen in the people's hearts. Biblically, forgiveness is an determined action that requires a tremendous efforts in one's heart. God being our Leader and Lord, He just did that for all of us through Jesus.

A. WHO IS THE TOP DOG?

Matthew 18:1-4 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus just told them about His death on the cross as the Roman's capital punishment and His resurrection. Obviously, the disciples were not concerned about that. Instead they were caught up in an argument of who the top dog, "Numero Uno" is among them.

When Jesus said to them, "become as little children," He didn't mean that we should be childish, but we should have childlike faith.

The reasons for the example of the little children Jesus is using are:

1) They are trusting their parents.

They don't think twice about if the parents are going to be there or not.

2) They are completely defenseless, so they know that they have to depend on their parents.

3) They have simple faith unlike the grown-ups'.

We come up with all the silly reasons and logics to hinder our faith in God.

4) They are sincere and brutally honest.

Why did Jesus say that they could not even enter the kingdom? Because accepting the fact we need Jesus as our Savior demands humility in our part instead of the prideful thought that we think we can make our ways into heaven.

Matthew 18:5-6 Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me. "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

We hear a lot about child pornography lately. Those who are into the child pornography whether they are making them or watching, they are in deep trouble with God. Not just them, M-TV programs, music videos and even Saturday morning cartoon become more and more corruptive against our children.

Some of you may say, "In this context, shouldn't it be regarding new believers?" Yes, you are absolutely right. But remember, God loves those little children.

Matthew 18:7-9 Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes! If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.

We ought not to be stumbling blocks, but stepping stones for our young believers to grow and nurtured them in the church.

B. GOD'S SEARCH FOR ONE SHEEP

Matthew 18:10-14 "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven. For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost. What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

When God compares the believers as sheep, it is not a compliment. Actually, sheep are dumb and defenseless. When was the last time you have seen an attack sheep with a pair of snarling fangs? They follow one leading sheep wherever it goes even to death. If you've noticed, the sheep was not looking for the Shepherd. It is the Shepherd who looks for him. It is God's search for men.

God and the heavenly angels rejoice for each new believer being found by Him.

Luke 15:10 Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

C. CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Matthew 18:15-17 "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if

he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

Jesus teaches us how to deal with a sinning brother. Many people leave one fellowship to another, because this was not done in proper way.

Above all else, we should go to him with the idea of winning our brother or sister, not winning an argument. It is possible to win the argument and lose them.

We must have a spirit of meekness and gentleness when we seek to restore a brother or sister.

Gal 6:1 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

The word restore in Galatians 6:1 is a Greek medical word that means "to set a broken bone." Think of the patience and tenderness that requires!

What started as a private problem between two people is now out in the open for the whole church to see. Church discipline is a much neglected ministry these days, yet it is taught here and in the epistles (1 Cor. 5; 2 Thes. 3:6–16; 2 Tim. 2:23–26; Titus 3:10). Just as children in the home need discipline, so God's children in the church need disciplines including excommunication.

Matthew 18:18-20 Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

We've studied this verse in chapter 16. We also learned that 'binding, loosing' mean 'forbidding and permitting' in Jewish term. That fits perfectly here in this context.

If I may rephrase what we just read, "whomever you forbid from your congregation because of his sin, will be forbidden from heaven because you did according to the Word of God, and whomever you permit to your congregation because of his repentance, will be permitted from heaven because you did according to the Word of God."

D. THE TRULY FORGIVEN UNDERSTANDS FORGIVENESS

Matthew 18:21-22 Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

Peter came to Jesus with the measuring rod of forgiveness and he felt that he was extra pious, because the average rabbi taught them to forgive up to three times.

The answer of Jesus completely blew his mind and his measuring rod of forgiveness out of water. Does it mean that we can smack somebody if that person offends us more than 490 times? No. In Jewish term, it is countless. According to 1 Cor 13:5 in NIV, Love, "keeps no record of wrongs."

Jesus explains in a great deal about forgiveness. God doesn't leave the one who offended others in the gutter to die. He teaches us how to restore them with the same forgiveness we have received from God. What we are learning here is "Not

condemnation, but evaluation with the purpose of restoration.” Not to destroy, but to build up.

Isn't it interesting that we often pray to God to give justice to others, but we beg Him to have mercy on us even if we committed the same sin as the others?

In next parable, we find three very interesting stages of the one who does not forgive:

Matthew 18:23-27 Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.

1) He was a debtor.

This man actually thought he could get out of the debt of 10000 talents which is equivalent to over \$10 million. We detect two sins here: pride and a lack of sincere repentance. The man was not ashamed because he stole the money, but he was ashamed because he got caught. And he actually thought he was big enough to earn the money to repay the king's account. In the economy of that day, a man would have had to work twenty years to earn one talent.

His case was hopeless. But the king was a man of compassion. The servant did not deserve this forgiveness. It was purely an act of love and mercy on the part of his master.

Matthew 18:28-30 But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt.

2) He was a creditor.

Instead of sharing with his friend the joy of his own release, the servant mistreated his friend and demanded that he pay the debt. The poor debtor used the exact same plea as the servant did. But the unjust servant was unwilling to grant to others what he wanted others to grant to him.

He may had the legal right to throw the man in prison, but he did not have the moral right.

Matthew 18:31-35 So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."

3) He became a prisoner.

The world's worst prison is the prison of an unforgiving heart. If we refuse to forgive others, then we are only imprisoning ourselves and causing our own torment. Some of the most miserable people I have met have been people who would not forgive others. They lived only to imagine ways to punish these people who had wronged them. But they were really only punishing themselves.

What was wrong with this man? The same thing that is wrong with many professing Christians: They have received forgiveness from God, but they have not really experienced forgiveness deep in their hearts. Therefore, they are unable to share forgiveness with those who have wronged them.

If we live only according to justice, always seeking to get what is ours, we will put ourselves into prison. But if we live according to forgiveness, sharing with others what God has shared with us, then we will enjoy freedom, joy and peace.

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

There are also three misunderstandings regarding forgiveness:

1) We don't have to say, "I understand for why you have done that."

If someone offend you in wrong way, they are responsible for their own actions. You don't have to understand their excuses for their wrong doings. But it is your obligation as a Christian to forgive them.

2) We don't have to say, "What you have done didn't hurt me."

Hurt is there. Pain is there. We don't have to pretend that it didn't hurt. But the same time we don't have to exaggerate our pain as a leverage to get back at them.

3) Forgiveness does not require restoration in every case.

There is time when you have to say, "Enough is enough." Forgiveness is an obligation as a Christian to the Lord and to the person who offended you. But restoration is not always required. Sometimes it is wise to cut off that bridge for future reoccurrence.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) Forgiving someone who hurt us deeply is not an option, but a MUST.

God is not giving us a whole lot of choices when it comes to forgiveness. This is a 'MUST' as Christians. You and I may come up with feeble reasons why we cannot forgive. Before we do that, let's think if we would like for God comes up with the same excuses why He couldn't forgive our sins against Him.

2) Remembering forgiveness of God requires our own forgiveness for ourselves, too.

If you think that God cannot forgive your sins, because they are so bad, you are calling God a liar. And He ain't a liar. As God forgave you for your sins, you must get over that ugly past and move on.

3) God's forgiveness for us is free. But the forgiveness from others will be satisfied with our repentance.

That means we no longer do what we have done.